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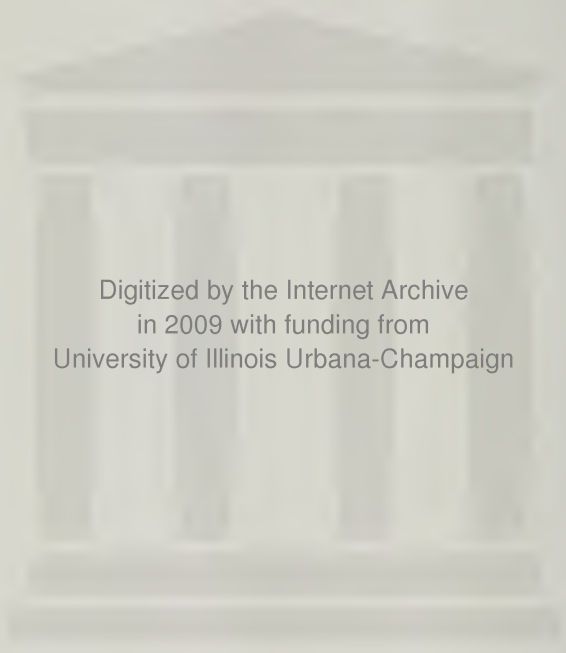
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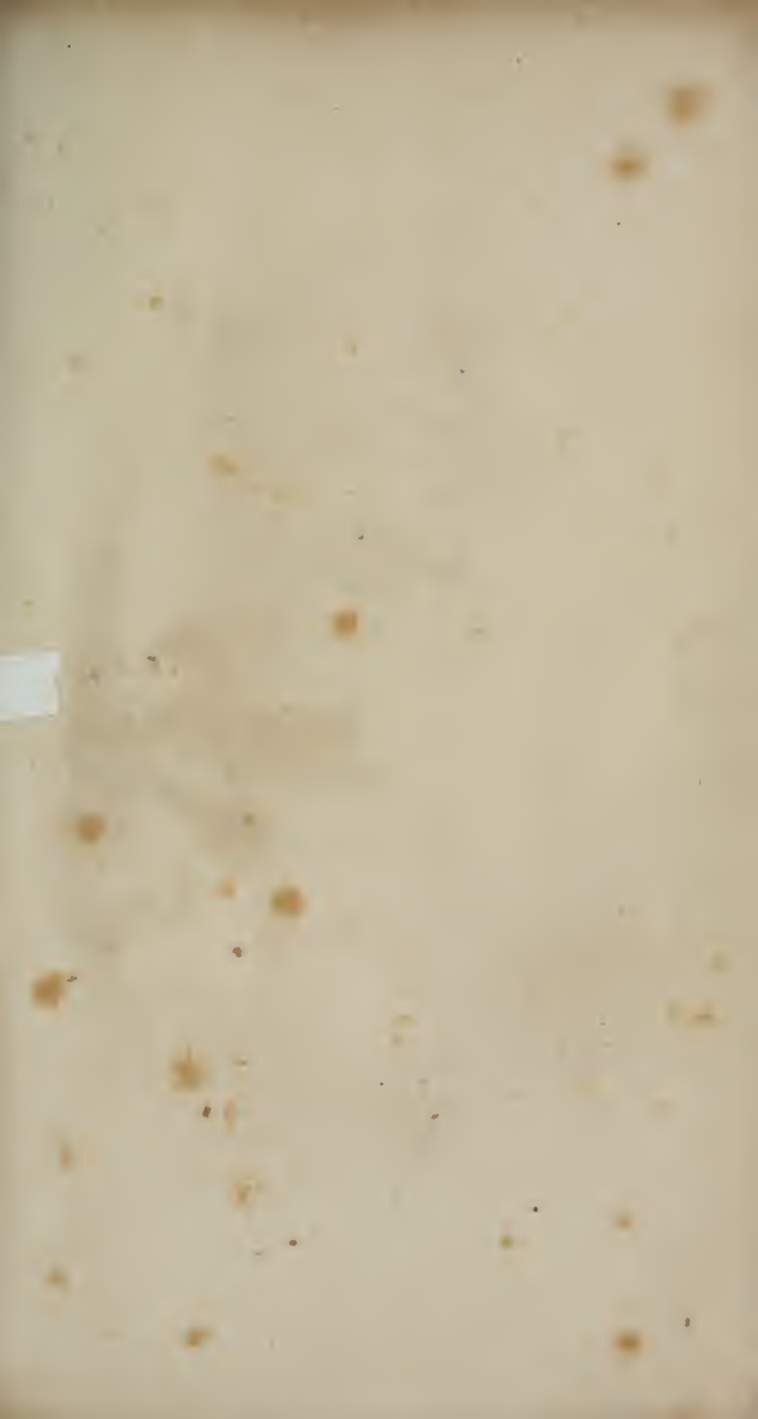
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THE STAGE COACH;

OR,

THE ROAD OF LIFE.

BY

JOHN MILLS, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ENGLISH GENTLEMAN."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

THOMAS HOULDSWORTH, ESQ., M.P.

&c. &c.

THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED

BY

HIS SINCERE AND OBLIGED FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

The Lawn, Twickenham,
August, 1843.

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P R E F A C E.

If I felt not a little diffidence in placing before the reading world my first literary production, "The Old English Gentleman," the unlooked-for favour and success which attended that work have doubled rather than dissipated my anxiety on the present occasion : for *then* I could not help feeling myself fortunate in a subject which came more or less "home to the business and bosom" of every true-born Englishman. The sports of the field, and the pleasures and pastimes of a country life, are so interwoven with the associations of all grades and degrees of my countrymen, that to describe them with tolerable accuracy could scarcely fail to meet with public favour. But in my present undertaking I fear that I

have less of the actual “appliances and means” of success to depend on, and must expect to be judged more by the extrinsic attire and circumstances in which I may have been able to clothe and set them forth; besides which, my subjects and characters are of so various and dissimilar a nature, that I can scarcely hope that those readers who may relish any one or more of them will be disposed to look with favour on the whole.

In this position, all I can do is modestly to throw the onus of my new work on those who encouraged the old one: for without that encouragement the present had unquestionably never been written. And I must (in all gratitude be it said) place this onus especially on the periodical critics of the day—who, if they *will* award more praise to a new writer than he merits, must not be surprised or angry at the natural consequences of their kindness and good temper.

J. M.

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THE STAGE COACH,

OR

THE ROAD OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

In the vicinity of Aldgate there is an old inn, at the end of a long, dark, narrow passage. The entrance to it is just sufficiently wide to admit a coach ; but the “ Whip ” must be an experienced hand to avoid grazing the wheels against the kerb-stones, and the outside passengers must bend their heads low to escape “ a bumper at parting.” The nimble-fingered ostlers plant themselves at the end of the passage leading into the street, and snatch the

warm clothing from the polished skins of the horses as they clatter past.—Alas ! we err in the tense ; all these things must now be spoken of (like the glories of old Troy) as things that *were !*

The building to which we have referred forms a contracted oblong, running to a great height, with large gable-ends jutting out in all directions. A wide balcony, rudely carved, and blackened with smoke and age, is thrown across from about midway of the steep walls, and upon it swings a time-worn sign, which for a century has creaked upon its rusty hinges. Corridors sweeping through the edifice, flanked with numbered doors, tell of its vast resources for wearied wayfarers ; but the rooms are deserted, and the distant sounds of the world without echo through them, like the sad tones of a funeral knell. In the yard are large stables ; but every stall is empty, and scarcely a flattened straw remains upon the sunken bricks. A battered horn-lantern still

hangs in one of the abandoned places, and blue mould stifles up the inch of candle that remains unconsumed in the socket.

Under an expansive shed are several coaches, closely packed together: spattered dirt and black streaks from the drifting shower begrime their formerly speckless panels, and the axles of the wheels are rusted from want of use.

It was on a Saturday evening, early in December, that a man slowly descended a ladder, from a hayloft over one of the stalls just described, and, with a lazy yawn, lifted his hands above his head, and stretched his legs upon the pavement. He was short and sturdy built, with shins that inclined to form a curve. His head seemed placed upon his shoulders as if Nature had economised, and dispensed with the superfluity of a neck. Crisp hair stood upon his head, "like quills upon the fretful porcupine." One full black eye alone performed the office of vision, the other having been cut out with the thong of a four-

in-hand whip, intended by a novice to lift a stinging fly from the tip of a leader's ear. His arms were so long that when standing upright he could polish the knees of his drab breeches—a habit very constantly practised by him. A round greasy cloth cap, stuck on one side of his head, gave him a careless, swaggering appearance; while a bright scarlet neckerchief, twisted once round where his throat ought to have been, added to the knowing, ostlerish costume.

“Dream!” he exclaimed in a grumbling tone; “who can help dreaming on ’em? Night an day—weeks, months, an years—all my blessed life and arterwards, I shall dream o’ the smoking, steaming, roaring, busting hells in harness: d—n all locomotives, I say!”

As he said this he slowly surveyed the building, until his gaze rested on the well-known door upon which “Tap” was painted. Folding his arms, he continued to look at the

closed room, and, shaking his head with a melancholy gesture, continued: "Isn't *that* enough to break a feller's heart, if it was harder than this?" stamping his iron-heeled boot upon the stone pavement; "isn't it a full pot o' misery! none o' your half-an-half, but reg'lar stingo misfortune. Many's the time and often I've blown a cloud o' happiness inside o' that red blinder; many's the gallon of heavy wet and goes o' mountain dew I've put under my waistcoat inside them bricks. Then to think o' the nights I've come out reeling, blind drunk as a Lord! Ain't it enough to make a feller hang his mother, or turn tee-totaller?"

With this pathetic self-interrogatory he buried both his hands in his pockets, and silently proceeded down the yard.

The dull leaden twilight was stealing over the city, and the humming of countless throngs, crowding its thoroughfares, began to be less vociferous. The speculators in the

precarious favours of Fortune smoothed the lines from their wrinkled brows, and were hurrying home to rest for a few brief hours from their fretful cares; wearied clerks straightened their bent backs as they rose from long-legged stools, upon which they passed the major part of their existence, and quitted the scenes of their captivity with the spirit of free'd birds. The peaceful hours of night were creeping on.

“One, two, three,” counted the ill-humoured ostler, as the chimes from a neighbouring church clanged the three-quarters of an hour: “very good! then there’s only fifteen minutes for me to light that fire, and it never can be got to blaze under thirty! my luck all over! howsomdever, here goes.”

Unlocking a door which opened into a wide apartment, called the Commercial-room, he took from the lofty mantel-shelf a tinder-box, and commenced striking the flint and steel.

“I never uses them lucifer fizzes,” said he

to himself — a personage, by the bye, whom he was very apt to honour with his private conversation; “they’re too savoury of the new-fangled reformin system. Give *me* the good old times of strike o’ lights in *this* way, although it *does* take a good deal of persewerin.”

Unusual patience appeared indispensable on the present occasion; bright sparks flew in showers upon the tinder, but none clung to it for a moment. At length a solitary one was discovered upon the edge of a little stray piece, and, exercising great care, a match was ignited, and the ready-prepared fuel in the large grate was set on fire. The straw and wood crackled and blazed, but the volumes of smoke, instead of ascending the yawning chimney, issued in dense masses from the bars, and rose curling to the ceiling.

“There ye go again!” exclaimed the ostler; “nothing but trouble and disappointment; as sure as my name’s John Hogg, I shall be smoked bacon presently.”

Vigorously he puffed and blew the obstinate flames, until at last they showed a disposition to rise, and shed a warming influence round the black walls. Then dragging a long mahogany table, polished like a mirror, save where the stains of steaming liquids had left indelible impressions upon it, he placed it in the centre of the room, and eyed with evident satisfaction the nicety of its position.

“It takes *me* to put a thing straight,” said John Hogg. “A one-eyed chap can always see truer than a feller with two; else why do folks shut a peeper when they go out a-shooting?”

Without pausing to solve this problem, he drew from a small cupboard a dozen glass goblets, a wide and deep china bowl containing a silver ladle with a long twisted whalebone handle, a large bag of lump sugar, some lemons, and a bundle of clay pipes. Putting these upon the table in proper order, he regarded with a cunning look the locked door

of a cupboard opposite the one he had been rifling of its contents, and said, "If I'd the rummaging o' you, wouldn't I make myself a comfortable snorter aforehand!"

"Would you, Jack?" inquired a gruff voice; "then I'll mix one for ye."

The speaker was a tall, corpulent man, who had entered the room unperceived by the soliloquiser. His ruddy weather-beaten visage was partly shaded by a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat, and a fat double chin was incased in the ample folds of a blue spotted shawl. A long striped waistcoat, approaching his knees, was buttoned closely over a portly body, and a pair of drab breeches, with fawn-coloured ribands dangling in graceful negligence at the knees, adorned a couple of tubby-looking legs. The coat, which afforded protection not only to his ample shoulders, but to his heels, was of faded brown, and highly-polished laced-up shoes completed the attire.

"And so you'd have a comfortable snorter

aforehand, would ye?" continued the speaker with an inward chuckle, shaking his fat sides, and extracting a key from one of his capacious pockets.

"Yes, Mr. Wirkem, sir, I would, and that's the truth on't," replied the ostler, looking somewhat confused; but I didn't mean you should know it. My luck all over," continued he; "sure to be found out."

"Never mind, Jack, never mind," said Mr. Wirkem, giving Jack a good-humoured smack on his left ear; "there's no harm in wishing, anyhow—darn my stockings!"

With this singular order for the repairs of the coverings to his legs, which was an innoxious substitute for the conclusion of sentences frequently couched in terms unfit for ears polite, Mr. Wirkem proceeded to unfasten the cupboard-door. Rows of black bottles, filled to the corks, lined shelves above shelves; and, after regarding the array with looks of unequivocal admiration, he selected two, and placed them upon the table.

“Brandy and rum,” said Mr. Wirkem. “Now for whiskey and gin,” continued he, taking two more of the bottles from the cupboard, and placing them by the side of the others.

“I’ll take a drop o’ rum, sir,” said the ostler, anticipating the proffered choice.

Mr. Wirkem’s sides shook for a considerable period previous to any sound emerging from his lips; when he managed to inquire, with concealed laughter, why Jack preferred rum.

“I can’t say, sir,” replied the ostler; “but it seems as nateral to my gums as milk is to a sucking babby’s.”

“I can tell ye, Jack,” rejoined Mr. Wirkem, trying to suppress his inward mirth. “I can tell ye; it’s chemical — it’s what I heard explained once at the Mechanics’ Institution — it’s chemical affinity.”

“What liquor’s that, sir?” asked Jack.

“It isn’t a liquor,” said Mr. Wirkem; “it’s a mixture of bodies adapted for one another.”

“ Ah ! I see,” responded Jack, winking his solitary orb ; “ a sort of *punch*, I ’spose.”

Mr. Wirkem’s ribs became again convulsed at Jack’s supposition. Like the internal rumbling of a volcano previous to its eruption, his smothered laugh invariably preceded the electricity of his wit.

“ Within the shaving of a lamp-post you’re right, Jack,” said Mr. Wirkem ; “ but didn’t it ever occur to you that your partiality for rum, above all other rebellious liquors, is occasioned by Nature having coined ye out of such *rum* materials ?”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha !” roared Jack ; “ ha ! ha ! ha ! Oh ! Mr. Wirkem, sir, may I be kidnapped and sold for a nigger if you don’t go a-head slick as soaped lightning, as the Yankee Doodles say.”

“ Whatever the Doodles may say,” said Mr. Wirkem, suddenly becoming serious, “ I beg you’ll not mention them, their sayings or doings, in my presence. If it was not for

those translanticated Doodles, Jack, it's my opinion I should be at this moment — ay, at this very moment," continued Mr. Wirkem, pulling with difficulty from its fob a thick silver watch, and shaking his head mournfully as he looked at the white dial, "driving the Regulator up this very yard," continued he, "and you preparing to ease the passengers of their superfluous sixpences."

"You don't say so!" responded Jack, stretching to the utmost limits of its capacity his one organ of vision.

"But I do," added Mr. Wirkem; "I do say so, John Hogg. It's them Doodles that have set the vicious example of doing away with all good old ways and customs—of what they call annihilating time and distance. It's those Doodles that have bitten Old England, and made her as rabid (*rapid* they call it) as themselves. Railroads and rows—canals and chartists—banks and bankrupts—companies and corruptions—ballot and beggary—repub

licans and rebels—all proceed from that weedy stock.”

“Then d—n the Doodles!” said Jack, between his teeth; “’ticularly on account of railroads,” continued he.

“Even in the most religious society,” replied Mr. Wirkem, “such a sentiment must be responded to with cordiality.”

The fire now began to blaze cheerfully in the grate—and a deep and wide one it was—when Jack tossed off the contents of the glass offered him by Mr. Wirkem, and proceeded to add more coals to the fire.

“We shall have a roarer directly,” said he, clearing the bottom bars of the stove with his fingers.

“The sooner the better,” responded Mr. Wirkem, “for the members will be here directly.”

At this moment the murmur of voices was heard, and the tramp of feet echoing up the yard.

“Here they come !” exclaimed Mr. Wirkem.
“Light the chandelier, Jack.”

This chandelier was a large wooden hoop hung in the centre of the room, upon which was stuck, upon tin “save-alls,” a thick circle of tallow “dips.”

Jack proceeded to obey the instructions, by lighting a piece of greased paper at the end of a long charred stick, and applying it to the candles.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Wirkem, as several persons crowded into the apartment, “welcome, one and all. Time to a second—yes,” continued he, as a church clock chimed the hour, “even to a second.”

“It’s been our custom for many a long year, Dick Wirkem,” responded a voice, “except when frosts and an occasional screw loose perwented.”

“Very true,” rejoined Mr. Wirkem ; “and we’re not the chaps to cut the traces of good old customs.”

“May that feller break his neck”——

“Stop! stop!” interrupted Mr. Wirkem. “There would be so many dislocations now-a-days, Bill Johnson, that we mustn’t pray for such deserts. No, no, no; whatever may be our causes for complaint, we’ll never have it said that malice is the axle of a coachman’s heart.”

“Bravo! *Bra-vo!*” cried several voices.

“But come,” continued Mr. Wirkem, “take your seats, my friends, and fill your pipes and glasses. Is the water hot, Jack?”

“As hot as”——

“No similes, John; no similes,” interrupted Mr. Wirkem: “hand the kettle round.”

In a high-backed elbow chair, with sturdy-looking short legs rudely carved, Mr. Wirkem seated himself, with much dignity, at the head of the shining table; while his friend Bill Johnson occupied one of a similar description opposite. The others seated themselves on each side, and after some bustle Mr. Wirkem’s

watchful eye was satisfied with the arrangement. In a few minutes steaming mixtures gratified the olfactories, pipes were charged with the fragrant weed, and the reign of good-fellowship commenced.

“Draw that old red curtain closer, Jack,” said Mr. Wirkem, “and poke the fire into a stinging blaze. There, now we look what I call comfortable, and there’s a great deal in looks,” continued he.

“So the gals have always told *me*,” responded John Hogg, taking his seat upon the bottom of an old stable pail, a little removed from the festive board. A burst of uproarious laughter followed this declaration of the ostler, and Mr. Wirkem observed that Jack was a pretty creetur for a lady’s lapdog.

“Nicely shaved, no doubt of it,” replied his right-hand friend, Jacob Plywel. “But come, Dick,” continued he, “let’s have the regulations, or rulers, or what-do-ye-call-ems read.”

Mr. Wirkem gave a nod of approval, and after tapping the table for silence with the bowl of his pipe, he rose majestically from his seat, and said in a deep bass voice—"Gentlemen, since our last meeting, which was also our first, I have been inwardly digesting the most patent safety means of conducting this Society. In me you were pleased to place the trust; and as far as I've been able to make the road run light, free from ruts and stumbling stones, by applying the ribands of thought with due consideration, it's no soft soap to say I have done so."

"Hear! hear! hear!" said Jacob Plywel.

"He's a leader at a speech," inwardly observed John Hogg.

Mr. Wirkem coughed, and proceeded:—"As I before stated, we have met but once before here as a body; and then," said the old coachman, with his preliminary chuckle, "we were but a dwarf compared to our present condition; so that it may be as well to

repeat what then took place, for the benefit of the new comers, which form the majority."

"Good again!" exclaimed the Vice-president.

"Like ghosts in a churchyard," resumed Mr. Wirkem, "myself, Bill Johnson there, and one or two more of the old hands, used to hang about the place after it was deserted by all its old inhabitants, save the rats. We couldn't leave it. The old Inn had been our home too long for us to turn our backs upon it. And so one evening, while we were standing under the gateway, as usual grumbling about the railways and such like, I thought if, instead of growling about what we had no drag to check, we were to get up a bit of a company in this room of an evening, and enjoy ourselves, it would be a better move. Without mentioning my plan then to any one, I went to the landlord, and asked him to let me this apartment. He desired me to tell him what I wanted it for. After a good deal

of hum-ing and ha-ing I told him. ‘Dick Wirkem,’ said he, with two great tears trickling down his jolly red face, ‘you may take the old place for nothing. It’s my own property; and if you can turn it into a coachman’s hospital, do—or anything of the description.’—As you may suppose, I felt uncommonly affected at this; and after squeezing his bunch of fives, with a quivering lip I said, said I, ‘I’ll do my best, sir, to make the fellows comfortable, you may depend on’t.’ He couldn’t speak, but mopping up his tears with the back of his hand, he filled up a half-pint beaker of port from his bottle, which stood upon the table, and motioned me to put it down the road, which I did accordingly. ‘You’ll come I hope to our meetings sometimes, sir,’ said I, ‘supposing we get ’em up?’—‘No, Dick,’ said he, ‘I couldn’t meet ye again yet; I will by-an’-by; but to see all of you as you are now, without the chance of a lift up, it would cut me too hard to bear.

Be patient under your ill luck ; stick to one another, and don't forget one-eyed Jack. I'll pay for his whack.' ”

At the conclusion of this sentence, John Hogg groaned audibly upon his pail. Mr. Wirkem cast his eyes towards him, and perceiving he was occupied only in counting the exact number of his fingers, asked in a very peremptory tone, “ why he was not smoking his pipe and drinking his grog ? ”

“ Because I ain't been axed,” replied he in a very surly voice. “ It's always my luck.”

“ There's an ugly-tempered grunter for ye, gentlemen ! ” said the old coachman, appealing to the company. “ Fill your glass immediately, sir,” continued he in a most authoritative voice, “ and make yourself such a stiff un that every drop may stand a fair chance of choking ye.”

“ Very good ! ” replied Jack, while a beam of satisfaction sparkled in his eye ; and, rising from his lowly posture, he proceeded to fulfil the instructions with great alacrity,

“Gentlemen,” continued Mr. Wirkem, “after my interview, I told my plan to Bill Johnson, Jacob Plywel, and my friend on the left here, Tom Short, who unanimously agreed that it was a crack sort of thing. Well, with a few more, who are now here, we had a meeting last Saturday, when it was decided to lay in a good stock of comfortables forthwith, to invite the chalked-off dragsmen here to-night, and for me to be prepared to start the way-bill, or rules, by which our club was to be governed.”

Loud marks of approbation interrupted Mr. Wirkem, who, after sipping his grog, resumed his address :—

“I *am* prepared,” said he. “In the first place, I propose christening this Club, or Society, or whatever else it may be,

THE CHALKED-OFF COACHMAN’S FREE AND EASY.”

“Hooray !” shouted John Hogg, springing off the pail, and with a kick from his ponder-

ous foot sending it to the furthest end of the room. "It's an out-an-out, slap up, send-me-rolling, clipper of a name," said he, flushed with excitement.

Mr. Wirkem looked both astonished and pleased at Jack's conduct, but continued his speech without making any comment upon it. "We'll have no proposing or balloting for members," said he; "but every dragsman in the kingdom that's run off the road by the rail" — (here an ill-suppressed malediction escaped the lips of John Hogg)—"shall be entitled to rest his legs under this mahogany," continued Mr. Wirkem. "No matter whether he has been the driver of a four-oss or a pair-oss coach. If he can pay his whack for the creature-comforts without pinching the old woman or the spokes of the old wheel at home, well and good; if not, why those who can make up the deficiency without feeling the screw must stand the handsome, and I'll always head the list."

Here loud hurrahs interrupted the old coachman's further progress. Cheer after cheer echoed through the old building, till every room seemed roused from its sombre silence. After some strenuous efforts to obtain an end of his companions' boisterous approbation, Mr. Wirkem continued—

“We'll have no written regulations for our behaviour, our time of meeting, or departing,” said he; “I hate all such nonsense. Every man that is qualified for a seat here may conduct himself just as he likes, so long as he makes himself agreeable to the rest. He may come when it suits him, drink what he pleases, and go when he thinks proper or his wife tells him.”

“Ha! ha! ha!” roared John Hogg, holding his sides. “Oh, Mr. Wirkem, sir!” said he, “if you don't beat Dolly, and she beat the devil!”

“Hush, John, hush!” returned Mr. Wirkem reprovingly, at which Jack's grinning cheeks became suddenly grave and elongated.

“I shall take the chair,” returned the old coachman, “precisely at six o’clock every Saturday evening, and quit it at twelve. If other gentlemen choose to follow my track, well and good.”

“We will, we will!” shouted the Vice-president.

“Those who don’t,” continued Mr. Wirkem, “can cut out one for themselves. I have nearly locked my wheels now; and have only this to say—every man must sing a song when he’s called on, or else tell a story.”

“But supposing he can’t do either?” suggested Jacob Plywel.

“I was coming to that when you stopped me, sir!” replied Mr. Wirkem, somewhat angrily. “We’ll accept of no *can’t*s here,” said he. “Can’t shall stand for *won’t*. Who ever heard of a coachman not able to say something of himself or his passengers? He must be a pretty sort of a nincompoop, who,

having seen so much of life, hasn't *nous* enough to say something about it, and he's certainly not fit for this society. And so the first *can't* will be the 'all right' for the first stage to Coventry, that's all."

"Well done, Dick Wirkem!" exclaimed the Vice-president; "you'll keep 'em to the collar, I know."

"To be sure I will," replied the old coachman; "and in order to make a beginning, I now," said he, taking his seat, "call upon you, Bill Johnson, to warble us a song."

"Capital! Famous!" exclaimed several voices, while loud clapping of hands signified the general satisfaction of the proposal.

"Well, gentlemen," returned the Vice-president, placing his pipe upon the table, and wiping his lips, "since it seems I mustn't refuse under fear of a disagreeable journey, here goes."

Clearing his throat, in a strong but musical voice he sang the following words:

Come fill the glass, 'twill win a smile
To chase away that swimming tear :
Nor scorn the spell which can beguile
A thought from life's dull bitter care :
For none in worlds so sad as this
Should lose a moment of sunny bliss.

The goblet drain—the juice will bring
The memory of years long past,
The songs our childhood loved to sing,
Those springtide joys which never last :
For none in worlds so sad as this
Should lose a moment of sunny bliss.

Now fill once more the goblet high,
To glad again thy drooping brow ;
'Twill drown the sorrow and the sigh,
The thought of all that wrings thee now :
For none in worlds so sad as this
Should lose a moment of sunny bliss.

At the conclusion of this song, many were the compliments paid to Bill Johnson by his companions. Mr. Wirkem was so much gratified that he rose and proposed the Vice-president's health with "unusual" honours. This was responded to with a display of hearty good-will ; and, after the blushing Bill John-

son had stammered out his gratitude for the honour conferred, he was reminded by Mr. Wirkem that he was entitled to a call.

“Then I’ll return the compliment,” said he to the President, “by calling upon you, sir, for a yarn.”

“Now for a rum un!” cried John Hogg, rubbing his hands with glee, and fixing himself in a posture of profound attention.

“None of your prophecies, John,” rejoined Mr. Wirkem.

“Snapped up again,” said Jack, sulkily. “It’s always my luck.”

“Darn my stockings!” exclaimed the old coachman; “who is snapping ye up?”

John returned no answer to this question, but stopped the tobacco in his pipe with his finger, and sent a thick cloud curling from his lips to the ceiling.

“Top the candles, Jack,” said Mr. Wirkem, in a conciliatory voice, “and make up the fire before I begin.”

The hoop was lowered by a string attached to the wall, and the candles dexterously snuffed with Jack's damped thumb and finger. After he had heaped fresh fuel upon the fire, the old coachman took a last whiff, knocked the ashes from the exhausted pipe, and, placing it upon the table, threw himself back in an easy position to perform the task imposed upon him.

Eagerness to hear was portrayed in every face. Every whisper was hushed, and not a sound could be heard as the old coachman commenced his story.

"When the bean was full in my tooth," said he, "that is, when I was just twenty-one, I was groom to Lord Haverford, one of the stanchest sportsmen in Christendom. In season he hunted three days a-week, shot three, and stopped all Sunday in the stable. By his orders I often used to ride the young osses to hounds, and, on one occasion, when I was mounted on a real top sawyer, the strangest

run took place that ever remained unrecorded. Perhaps, gentlemen, you would like to hear the particulars of it."

A ready and general assent was given, and Mr. Wirkem resumed—

"I have always called it," said he,

"THE DEVIL'S HUNT."

CHAPTER II.

THE DEVIL'S HUNT.

In most packs there is what is called the leader or favourite hound (said Mr. Wirkem); but in my Lord's kennel there was a couple of fine fellows, named Brilliant and Brimstone, so much alike in pace and power, and all the good qualities which belong to first-rate crack hounds, that no one could say which was best. I have often heard Tom Moody, the famous whipper-in, who you must all have heard of, say that such perfect symmetry in a couple of hounds from the same kennel was never equalled.

"There," said he to me one day as he was coaxing his pets between his legs, "there's

two angels of hounds, Dick. I never see such perfection before. Look at 'em in all their parts; survey their straight legs; look at the round feet, back shoulders, wide breasts, broad backs, deep chests, thin necks, small heads—and then regard these tails, Dick—there's tails! No court plume ever was more bushy or better carried."

"I'm no great judge of a hound, Mr. Moody," replied I, "but they certainly are uncommon handsome looking."

"And their looks don't belie 'em, bless their hearts!" rejoined he.

Well, it was about the close of the season when I had orders to ride a oss we called Nick's Own. In the whole course of my riding and driving I never come near such a beggar to pull; his mouth was as devoid of feeling as a piece of tanned hide. I didn't much relish the mounting o' this chap, although a better never champed a bit, but his temper was as vicious as an untamed unicorn's, and

as to holding him, you might as well pull against destiny. He was a great favourite of his Lordship, and had won several great steeple-chases; but seldom was ridden after hounds, because he was as likely to go before as to follow 'em.

Nick's Own threw back his sleek ears, and tried to give me a pat on the knee as I threw myself into the saddle.

"That was well meant," said Tom Moody, seeing the devil's movement.

"Yes," replied I, "but, like a great many good intentions, it failed in the aim."

The whipper-in laughed, and bade me keep a fair distance from the pack if I could manage it.

The old song says:

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky
Proclaims the hunting morning,"

and such we were blessed with on this memorable occasion. A soft gentle breeze seemed to breathe upon us from some sunny clime,

and a heavy shower had left the ground in the prime order : it was moist, but not saturated. There was a thin fog too, which, like a woman's veil, shaded, but didn't hide what was wanted to be seen.

"The scent will lay breast-high to-day," said James Dorey, the huntsman.

"Yes," replied the whipper-in, "over head and ears : there'll be no time for picking gaps to-day."

When we arrived at the place of Meet, all the Gentlemen o' the Hunt were assembled, to the number of about two hundred and fifty. I suppose a set better mounted and equipped eyes never rested on.

"Gentlemen," said Lord Haverford, as we came up, and his eyes sparkled as he spoke, "he who would take the brush to-day must ride well and boldly too, or I am much mistaken in my judgment."

He little thought how truly he spoke.

The order was given for the throw-off, when

the merry pack rushed into a neighbouring thick furze covert. Not a minute elapsed, no, nor yet half a one, when Brilliant and Brimstone's cries rung through the wood at the same moment, making every heart thrill again.

"Hark to Brimstone! Hark to Brilliant!" hallooed James Dorey. "For'ard, for'ard!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Tom Moody, "it's a pity one can't halloo both of 'em at once; for it's a d—d shame to cheer one before the other."

Every hound flew to the cry, knowing full well it was as true as the sun. So hearty did each join in chorus that the loaded air trembled again with the joyous notes.

I was stationed on the verge of the covert, about the centre of it, when I saw the varmint creep across a ride. Such a fox I had never seen before, and believe no one had seen or ever will again. He was as big as a small wolf, and his skin shone, and was almost as

dark as a piece of polished walnut - tree. His brush seemed nearly twice as long as his body, and was *jet black*, except just a morsel of white at the tip. I tried to give him a halloo, but, darn my stockings, if the "tally-ho" didn't stick in my throat. Like a Norfolk turkey I was crammed with surprise, and couldn't so much as utter a word. The varmint's brush had scarcely disappeared on the opposite side of the ride, when the couple of hounds, Brimstone and Brilliant, swept like meteors on his trail, followed by the straggling pack. Crashing through the thorny furze, the gallant hounds hotly pressed the sneaking thief, and in a few seconds a faint "view-halloo" was heard from the end of the wood.

Nick's Own reared as I slackened my reins, and away he went like an untrapped falcon. Straining every nerve and muscle, I managed to obey my Lord's loud halloo to "hold hard and let them get at it;" but it was more than a mortal tug, I assure ye. I was first at the

end of the covert, and Tom Moody rushed past me with a bunch of tail hounds, cap in hand, and making the hills ring again with the most musical voice a whipper-in ever had, before James Dorey had a chance of heading him. He happened to be in a thick part of the covert when the "tally-ho" was given, which seemed to tremble from the lips, instead of coming cheerily from the linchpin of the heart; but, clapping the gaffs to his sorrel mare, she soon put him in his right position.

"Did you see the fox?" inquired Lord Haverford of a yokel who was scratching his head and leaning against a gate-post.

"Zounds! but I zeed somethin like un," said he; "but dang my wig, if I ever zeed a vorx like un avore!"

Away we went like fleecy clouds before a gale.

"Now, you ardent Sportsmen," said his Lordship, with a merry laugh, addressing the

field — “ride straight, and let no raspers quail ye.”

The fox led us, at the commencement of the run, over a wide open heath called the Rough. For nearly a mile there was not a single leap, and, as it was bare ground, except a clump of stumped bushes here and there, we frequently caught a glimpse of sly reynard, who was doing his best to increase the distance between his brush and Brimstone and Brilliant’s willing jaws. I never shall forget Tom Moody’s face after seeing the varmint; his cheeks blanched, and his eyes seemed ready to spring from their sockets.

“Thunder and lightning!” exclaimed he, “what have we got here?”

“A fox unkennelled from hell, I believe,” replied James Dorey, little less astonished than the whipper-in.

“I saw him in covert,” added I, “and was struck dumb with surprise.”

“Be he what he may,” said Tom, regaining

his self-possession, "even if he's the Prince of Darkness himself, we'll have his brush."

On the gallant hounds pressed the mysterious varmint, leaving not more than five score yards between them and him, when a rail-fence, which separated the heath from a gentleman's park, stood before us. It was a perpendicular of six feet at least, with a wide and deep ditch at its foot. I saw the fox spring at it, and like a bird he took the whole without touching a pad upon the fence. The two leaders, as if scorning to be excelled in the jump, imitated his example, and cleared the fence as if shot from a crossbow. The other hounds scrambled upon the top, all managing to get over. Myself, the huntsman, and Tom Moody were riding abreast, and exchanged looks as we approached the stifler. Nick's Own, when he saw the work cut out for him, prepared to perform his best. He stretched out his long neck, and, gathering himself up for his bold leap, measured the

distance, and, with a steady bound, rose in the air, and over we went with the lightness of a wafted feather. I was just first of the three, and I turned my head to see how the others would manage to brush the rasper. Together they rose at it, and, with the exception of some music from their horses' heels striking the top-rail, effected a landing without much appearance of difficulty.

"Hark for'ard ! hark for'ard !" shouted the huntsman, laughing, and turning round to see how the young Nimrods would face the fence.

"Over !" cried his Lordship, throwing out his whip-hand, and taking it in true sportsman-like style.

"That's the way for the master of a hunt to ride," said Tom Moody, "as if his neck was not more precious than his servants'."

Many of the gentlemen succeeded in the attempt to follow Lord Haverford ; but the greater part of them tried the artful dodge, and hoped to shirk the jump by getting round.

This manœuvre, however, failed, for long before they could get to the end of the rails we were miles away, going at the most topping speed.

“There’s a purl,” said the huntsman, as a horse and rider came headforemost to the ground.

“Pick up your crumbs,” cried Tom Moody; which was scarcely said before the horseman was again in his saddle, and rattling towards us at a merry pace.

“There’s blood there!” exclaimed James Dorey, admiringly.

“Ay, and tough bone too, or there would have been fractures to splice,” added the whipper-in.

We swept across the park for nearly three miles, and it was as beautiful a place as I have seen in my life. Thick and widely-spreading oaks reared their topmost branches in the clouds, from which flocks of rooks cawed and flapped their wings. Beneath clumps of dark

green firs startled deers sprang from their lairs, and raced with the affrighted ringdove. Here and there were deep and wide pools covered with water-lilies and rushes, in which the cunning moorhen sported. Dense groves were sprinkled and dotted over the wide range of emerald turf, and as we passed the end of one of them we came suddenly in view of a mansion. It was a strange-looking old building, and, except the countless small windows which sparkled in the light from all quarters, was covered with dark green ivy. Tall, crooked chimneys, through which the smoke must perform many a whirl before it could make its exit, reared themselves above the roof. A solid stone porch jutted out in the centre, covered with grey moss, and over its iron-studded door the martins had plastered many a nest. Upon a wide terrace, before the entrance, a lady stood, holding by his hand a young fair boy. Long, light ringlets hung down his shoulders, among which the wind

played and danced. He might have seen ten summers, not more ; still his boyish cheer burst from his heart as we whirled past, and the crimson blood mantled in his cheeks, while his eyes flashed the fire he felt.

My Lord bowed as he galloped by, and the lady bent a curtsy in acknowledgment.

“ That shows what breeding is,” said the huntsman ; “ that young colt comes from some of the best stock in England.”

“ And not a poor specimen of the blood,” added Tom Moody.

“ A poor specimen !” repeated James Dorey : “ while the stock is kept up, as it has been for the last three centuries, how should a mongrel come of it ?”

After the fox had passed the mansion some distance, he became lost to view from dodging round an extensive wood ; and, making a feint to enter it, he immediately backed out, and thereby caused a short check. But the first cast the hounds hit off the scent again,

and the breathing time was of short duration.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Lord Haverford, “use the persuaders if your horses lag.”

The fence was now to be charged again. I saw several look as if they felt very queer as they neared it, and more than two or three pulled their horses completely round rather than take it.

“I dare not again,” I heard one say; “my horse isn’t up to it.”

Huge drops of sweat trickled down the glossy coat of Nick’s Own, and the snowy foam scudded in flakes from his bit; but still his strength was not diminished, and he continued to pull upon the rein as when we started. In the same style he approached the rails, and, as if envying the position of being first, he rushed past all before him, and, like an antelope, crossed the fence without brushing a splinter.

Some refused the leap, some fell, and some

cleared it. Every cocktail was shaken off, and only the select few left.

We now entered a fallow country, over which the hounds went at a tremendous speed. Our horses, however, soon discovered the difference of running upon turf and heavy plough; and after we had been at this work for about thirty minutes without a single check, and tolerable stiff jumps at every four or five acres, a good many of 'em began to roar "bellows to mend." Nick's Own, however, seemed as fresh as ever, and the more exertion the ground required, the more he revelled in the amusement. Hedges and ditches, banks, gates, and stiles were all the same to him; and, as for distance, he appeared to get fresher the farther he went.

Mile after mile was scoured without our seeing reynard; but every now and then some rustic's "view-halloo" proved we were no great distance from his brush.

Hitherto the hounds had kept so close to-

gether that a table-cloth would have covered the whole ; but now they began to string one after the other, to the great mortification of Tom Moody, who tried his best to get them on. He cheered, flogged, and rated ; but all was useless : nature was exhausted ; on they could not go at the pace.

“ Leave them, Tom, leave them,” cried his Lordship : “ follow on ; they must be recovered by an by.”

A wide brook was now in sight, flanked with tall rank grass, and to which the hounds made a direct course. When they arrived on the edge of the stream, they ceased to give tongue. Up and down they sniffed for the lost scent. Round, right and left, the huntsman made his quick casts ; but their united exertions were of no avail. This check enabled the tail hounds to come up, and the panting horses to regain their spent breath.

Some few minutes passed, when Tom Moody

rose in his stirrups, and made the welkin ring with his "tally-ho."

Up a steep hill in the distance, on the opposite side of the stream, the fox streaked, with something running before him.

"Sea and earth!" exclaimed the huntsman, shading his eyes with his hand, "if that sly beggar hasn't pricked a hare from her form."

It was true enough. The varmint had found a puss in a copse on the other side of the water, and was driving her before him, in order to baffle his pursuers. A roar of laughter issued from all of us as we discovered this device.

"It's no use, you cunning rascal!" said James Dorey, taking his horse from the bank about thirty yards, and rushing him at it.

"Ware horse!" cried he, as a hound blundered before him. "Over!" was the cheer, and a clean jump he made of it, although it was little less than nine yards.

“ Hold hard !” shouted Tom Moody, as two or three prepared to follow ; “ let the hounds get across first.”

The huntsman blew his horn, and every hound plunged into the stream, and, cheering them on, he lifted them towards the brow of the hill, where the fox became lost to view.

“ Cram them at it, gentlemen,” said his Lordship, dashing his rowels into his horse’s flanks, and clearing the brook. Tom Moody followed, and then I tried my luck. But Nick’s Own slipped as he took the leap, and in we went head over heels, making the water hiss and boil like a great cauldron. It was very deep where we fell, and I was unsaddled by the jerk : but by good fortune, when I rose to the surface, I managed to catch hold of a stirrup, and Nick’s Own making the best of his way out, he dragged me to the bank. Up it I scrambled, and, as one good turn deserves another, I now assisted Nick’s Own to land. I hauled and lugged at his head, until with a

desperate effort he disengaged his fore-feet from the mud, and threw them upon the bank, and, backing the exertion with another equally good, he absolutely rolled ashore. Up he sprang, and into the saddle I climbed, more like a drowned rat than anything else; but not a horse was in sight, and not a hound could be heard.

“They’re gone that way,” bawled a man at plough, and pointing to the right.

“No, no, I tell ye,” said another in a field adjoining, “that’s the road they took,” pointing in an opposite direction.

Not heeding these conflicting weathercocks, I made for the hill at a swinging gallop, in the hope of getting upon the right track. Thinking the fox might be making for some strong earths, called the Shrubbery Pits, I took a straight course for them. For some time I continued without hearing a sound of the chase; but frequently saw the stamps of it in the trampled ground and broken fences.

At length I thought I heard a cry in the distance, and on I urged Nick's Own to do his best. A short distance further I saw the flash of a bit of pink. I was on the right road, and a handful of seconds would bring me among them again. "Over!" cried I, as we crashed through a tall hawthorn hedge. The horse's fore-feet plunged upon the body of a worn-out hound. She uttered a faint howl, and was dead in an instant. I felt very sick at this accident, for, although a young un, she promised to be one of the best in the pack. Poor Melody! her note was never heard again!

At a corner of the field I saw a couple more, stretched upon the ground, with lolling tongues. They were quite powerless with fatigue. Upon casting my eyes along the hedgerows, I saw several extended upon the earth, and some creeping about to hide themselves. The work begins to tell, thought I; and no wonder, for we could not have gone a

furlong less than thirty miles from the start, at a racing pace, with but a single check. Upon entering a wide fallow, I perceived a gentleman kneeling by the side of his fallen horse: he was opening a vein with his pen-knife; but the blood refused to flow: the heart was still.

“He’s dead, by Heaven!” he passionately exclaimed as I came up.

“How did he fall, sir?” I inquired.

“His heart’s broken,” he rejoined; “but ride on; you’re fresh enough, I see; don’t let me spoil your sport: ’tis useless to stop; it’s all over.”

Seeing that it was so, I left him, and, clearing the next fence, a quickset hedge, I perceived three others, standing by their jaded animals, slackening the girths, and doing all that was in their power to recover them.

“*You* may see the end of it, Dick,” cried

one, “ but not a soul else will, I’ll bet a thousand.”

“ I’ll try, sir, you may be sure,” replied I, sweeping past them.

A short distance further, and I passed a couple of hounds, going as fast as they had strength to go ; but it was a sorry rate : still they managed to crawl on. Through a punishing bullfinch Nick’s Own flew, and there we were up with the hunt again, or, more properly speaking, with the *fag*-end of it. His Lordship, the huntsman, Tom Moody, and seven more, with three couple and a half of hounds, were all that were left. I need scarcely say Brimstone and Brilliant were among them.

“ Ah !” exclaimed Lord Haverford, well pleased at seeing us up again, “ I thought Nick’s Own would not be among the lagging stragglers, let what would happen. Keep him at it, Dick. If you have to ride all night he can carry you.”

The country over which we were now running consisted principally of grass land. It was smooth and level, and, the fences being small and far between, the work was comparatively easy. But the pace continued a killing one, and the few staunch hounds, which now stuck to the scent, ran like greyhounds in a course. All held their places for about four miles further, when some dwarf-rails, separating a field from a narrow lane, caused a couple and a half more of hounds to fall backwards from the top, and to remain on the ground, with only a struggling attempt to rise, so breathless and tired were they. Two horses fell at the leap also, and one rider pulled up at it, knowing that he could go no farther.

“No matter!” hallooed his Lordship, seeing that Tom Moody hesitated to proceed. “While a hound can run, and a horse can move, I’ll have the hunt continued,” said he.

Two wide fields more we scoured, and, just as we entered the third, down his Lordship’s

horse fell as if a whistling bullet had crashed through his brain. I checked Nick's Own; but the instant my Lord rose upon his legs, which he did quicker than can be told, he waved his hand for me to proceed.

"We shall have it all to ourselves presently," said James Dorey.

"Yes," replied the whipper-in; "it will be uncommon select presently, I know."

A narrow but deep, dry ditch, with a high bank, now stretched itself before us. One of the hounds fell in climbing the bank, and slipped into the ditch, to remain there.

"There you go again," cried Tom Moody, dashing his spurs into his staggering horse, and just managing to get over. The huntsman was not so fortunate. His horse reached the top of the bank, and, like a balancing pole, rocked to and fro upon the edge of it, when backwards he came with his rider to the ground, but without any serious injury.

“ I can go no further,” said a horseman, as his reeling steed answered the gaffs by coming to a dead stop.

“ And I won’t try,” said another, reining in.

The two others imitated his example, and, out of the whole field, with fifteen couple of as crack hounds as ever were unkenneled, only Tom Moody, myself, and a couple and a half, now remained.

“ You’ll hold on after I’m run to a standstill,” said the whipper-in.

“ Yes,” replied I; “ Nick’s Own can go, as my Lord says, all night, if he’s wanted.”

“ He’ll have to do so, if you’re to see the end of it,” rejoined Tom Moody, “ or I’m much deceived.”

“ There he goes!” cried I, making the “ view-halloo” echo far and wide, as I saw the varmint running up a grass meadow just before Brilliant and Brimstone, who, as usual, were side by side. The third hound, Strug-

gler, was some distance from them, and it was evident could not run much farther.

“It’s my belief that fox, or whatever he may be,” said the whipper-in—“for I think now, as I thought from the first, that there’s something wrong about him—will run for ever.”

I laughed at this; but Tom Moody was as serious as a Quaker.

A few strides more, and the whipper-in—who had never been thrown out of a chase before, and never was since till the day of his death—was beaten. I hallooed him forward; but he shook his head, and dismounted from his almost dying horse.

Nick’s Own seemed to know that he had beaten every rival in the race—for it was more like a race than a hunt. With renewed energy he rattled along till I had to check him at the tails of the hounds. With the fox not two hundred yards before us, we thus continued the chase. As we were crossing a

stubble-field, Struggler fell, and then not a dog was up but the two leaders. The gallant hounds strained each muscle and sinew, with undaunted courage and perseverance, to near their victim. As if to preserve their breath, the thunder of their tongues was stilled, and they pursued him silently, although in view.

The shades of evening now began to drop darkly around: still the chase went on. The moon 'struck her pale beams through a thin fleecy cloud; the bright stars twinkled in the blue firmament, and were reflected in the mirror of waters: still the chase went on. Like gliding shadows the hounds and fox skimmed before me; but not a yard was gained upon him; hill and dale, heath and moor, were swept across without a sound to be heard, save the heavy beating of my horse's feet, and the occasional yelp of a distant watch-dog: still the chase went on.

At length the hounds became fainter to my

sight. I clapped the spurs to my now jaded horse, but he answered them not, and began to stagger and reel like a toper. A few lengths farther, and down we came into a quagmire.

I scrambled from the mud, and climbed a bank to see if I could catch a glimpse of the hounds; but they had gone far away, and not a sign of their whereabouts was visible.

After a lapse of a quarter of an hour, I got Nick's Own from the bog, and led him, jaded almost to death, to a neighbouring farm-house, where we stopped the night.

The following morning I inquired in all directions for the hounds; but could obtain no information whatever. Not a soul had seen or heard of them, and I had to return home without any intelligence respecting them.

Days and weeks passed; but the continued

search for the hounds proved entirely fruitless. The county was scoured from end to end without effect. At length reports began to be whispered that this desperate hunt must be something more than a mortal one. The old people shook their heads ominously when Brilliant and Brimstone were mentioned, and gave it as their opinion, "that it was lucky Nick's Own fell at last, or I might have been carried to the devil himself perhaps, where they expected the couple of hounds were now kenneled."

Wonders, however, cease to be wonders when sufficient time has elapsed to scrape off the paint and varnish. At last the fate of the two leaders was no longer discussed, and they, like many other famous dogs, were forgotten.

Mr. Wirkem appeared to have arrived at the terminus of his tale. His voice gradually

dropped, like a Methodist parson's winding up an harangue, and, to the disappointment of John Hogg, he came deliberately to a full stop.

"I hope that isn't the last stage," said the Vice-president.

"Why, not quite," replied Mr. Wirkem. "It's the last but one, though; and I wanted to wash my mouth out before I proceeded," continued he, raising his glass.

"Ay," added Jacob Plywel, "talking makes one's throat dry and dusty as an unwatered road in summer."

"I want to hear uncommon what becomes o' them poor hounds," observed Jack, looming through a dense cloud of smoke.

"You shall hear as far as I know, Jack, presently," replied Mr. Wirkem. "But snuff those candles first, and stir up the fire."

Again John's thumb and finger were damped to perform the required office; and,

after it was done, and the coals poked into a roaring blaze, Mr. Wirkem resumed his posture of ease, and continued his story.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEVIL'S HUNT CONCLUDED.

About a twelvemonth after this event (said Mr. Wirkem), a vacancy occurred in the box of the old Regulator, caused by that which makes a gap in all mortal occupations—grim-visaged Death. Poor Bob! he pulled up at the Blue Boar as usual, while the church clock was striking the hour; and just as the last stroke fell upon the bell, the reins dropped from his fingers: his spirit had started on another road; but I'll be answerable it was the right one.

I was a great favourite of the proprietor, and, with my Lord's consent, was forthwith appointed to the situation, which I filled forty

years and nine months, and took but five holidays in the whole time.

I had been driving seven years to a day, when one dark morning in the middle of November I started with one outside passenger, who had the box-seat, and not a soul inside. He was a rough-looking customer in the face, and carried no luggage, except a blue bag, which he held between his knees. I am no great beauty myself; but, I think, of all the queer physiognomies I ever put eyes on, he had the queerest. His eyebrows were so rough and shaggy that they almost covered his daylights, and they sparkled under them like two hot coals. There was no bridge to his nose; in fact, he had no nose at all, but merely the thick end of one, which turned up, and looked like a large pear. His mouth was a lipless slit, and a pair of short, black, scrubby whiskers met under a large fat double chin. He wore a brown-worsted skull-cap, and a Mackintosh cape, much the worse

for work. I didn't like the appearance of this customer, I can assure ye, and I began to speculate as to what he was, and what he was travelling for; but, as I couldn't learn much by that, I commenced a little of the cross-examination principle.

"It's a very unpleasant morning, sir," said I, just as we got off the stones of Peter-bridge.

"I knew that afore you told me," he growled in reply.

Oh, of the surly order, eh! thought I. But I always could sweeten a sour temper, and, being only one to talk to, I thought it worth while to try in this case. I was just going to make the observation that "there could be little doubt of his knowledge in all matters"—when he seemed to know what I was going to say before I spoke a word.

"Most people are of your opinion," said he; "but I am not so well informed in some things as 'tis said I am."

As you may suppose, I stared when he made this observation; but he appeared not the least disconcerted at my hard looks. After a considerable pause, I was about saying that "he might as well ease himself of the trouble of holding the blue bag, and put it in the boot"—when, just as before, without a syllable being spoken, he said—

"Thank you; but I invariably carry this property myself. It's too valuable to trust out of my own possession."

Well, if I was astonished at what he said before, I was totally stuck and wholly stammered at this. Although it was so cold a morning, drops of perspiration burst out of my skin and trickled down my nose. "Who the devil can he be!" thought I.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the queer passenger; "you'd like to know, wouldn't ye?"

I was going to ask him whether I had spoken.

"You must be as good a judge about that

as I am," said he, without my giving utterance to a word.

Sirs, I was doubled up all of a heap. "I won't think any more of you," thought I to myself.

"Then your society will not be so agreeable as I anticipated," observed the queer passenger, taking a short pipe from his pocket: "and so here goes for a whiff," continued he.

Habit made me inclined to ask whether I should pull up at the next cottage to get a light, and the words were on the tip of my tongue, when they were stopped short by his saying—

"You're polite, against your will. Accept my sincere thanks for your kindness; but I always carry about me the means of procuring a light. Look!"

With this he appeared merely to breathe into his pipe, and immediately such a cloud came from his mouth that almost hid the team from my sight. It had a very strong,

strange smell too, quite unlike any tobacco that ever came under my notice. The fire in the bowl crackled and snapped as he puffed away, like the funnel of a steam-boat, and he seemed to be enjoying himself to a remarkable degree. I felt queerer and queerer. I tried to sing; but not a song or a tune could I remember. Then I screwed up my lips for a whistle; but not a sound would come from them. No; all my thoughts and senses were engaged in thinking of the chap on the box-seat, and nothing on my part would stop them. I did all I could to drag myself from wondering and speculating; but my eyes fell upon the blue bag, and I couldn't help saying to myself, "I'd give a crown to look inside of it."

"'Tisn't worth the money," said he, taking away the pipe, and sending forth a volume of smoke as black and as thick as a thunder-cloud. "You may have a peep at the property in this lawyer's bag for nothing some

day," continued he with a chuckle, "when you'd prefer looking at any thing else."

I was more puzzled than ever. "Heaven and earth!" I mentally exclaimed.

"Come, come," said he angrily, "leave the former spot alone. 'Being of the earth, earthy,' you may talk of that."

I had not spoken or uttered a word.

"No," continued he; "but a thought engendered is as bad as a thought expressed."

I was struck all of a heap, as it were. There I sat mute with fear and astonishment, with the reins and the whip clutched in my hands, but my eyes riveted on the blue bag.

"You are still curious about my property, I see," observed the queer passenger. "But all the information respecting it that you'll get," continued he, "is this, that although it's purely personal, in the strictest sense of the term, yet it may truly be described as being *entailed*."

Just as he had concluded this we neared

the end of the first stage. I felt quite a relief as I saw the fresh osses on the top of the next hill, and Harry Slygo at their heads. I let out my whip, and flanked the leaders into a spinning gallop. Away we rolled at a youthful pace, and were about half-way up the hill, when a hollow note, something like the cry of a distant hound, caught my ear. The queer passenger threw his ears forward like a startled hare, and then it was that I first saw how uncommon long they were. Again the sound was audible.

“It’s them! it’s them!” cried he wildly, throwing away his pipe, which scudded away in the air like an oyster-shell. “Pull up instantly,” continued he; “I thought I should join them here to-day, although they outran me all to nothing.”

Without asking why or wherefore, I did as I was ordered, and brought the old Regulator to a standstill as soon as possible.

Excitement flashed in the eyes of the queer

passenger, and lit them up as brightly as the gas-lamps. He stood upright on the box, and looked like a stag gathered for a spring.

“Here they come!” he shouted, as the sound neared us: “I see ’em; tally-ho! tally-ho!”

Just as he had finished the view-halloo, something white swept across the road, about fifty yards from the horses’ heads. I strained my eyes to discover what it was—it was the skeleton of a fox!

“Haw, haw, haw!” laughed the queer passenger, and again his cheer burst from his throat; for, as I have said, he had no lips.

The varmint lifted the bone of his brush, and slipped through a gap in the hedge, when, just as he disappeared, two larger skeletons, running neck and neck, followed in his track, with the speed of light.

“Harkaway! harkaway!” hallooed the queer passenger, and with a loud laugh he

leaped into the air, and glided off in the thin fog with his blue bag, till I could see no more of him or them.

Mr. Wirkem paused, and looked triumphantly round the table. Curiosity was still depicted in each countenance, but the old coachman resumed his pipe, and appeared to have nothing more to say.

At length the Vice-president broke the reigning silence by asking Mr. Wirkem's opinion as to what the skeletons were.

"Why, those of Brimstone, Brilliant, and the fox, to be sure," replied the old coachman, elevating his eyebrows with affected surprise at the question.

"But who the devil was the queer passenger?" inquired Jacob Plywel.

"Why, the devil, of course," responded Mr. Wirkem, "who without doubt had his tail coiled up in the lawyer's bag."

As the old coachman concluded his story,

the bell from a church clock boomed the hour of midnight. As the last stroke fell, he rose from his chair, and lifted a broad-brimmed hat from a peg.

An inward rumble was heard as he placed it upon his head, and his face was purple from suppressed laughter. Jack's vigilant eye caught a glimpse of Mr. Wirkem's secret mirth.

"Haw, haw, haw! Oh, Mr. Wirkem, sir, if you ain't been a-cooking us brown!" roared Jack.

Then such a peal of laughter came from his lips, and was joined in by the assembly, while far and wide the sounds of mirth were echoed and re-echoed.

"I knew we should have a clipper," said John Hogg, admiringly, while a large tear, from excessive laughter, stood glistening in his eye.

"What an inventive brain you've got, Dick Wirkem," said the Vice-president, buckling on a waterproof cape.

The old coachman looked gratified at the compliments paid to his inventive genius, and exchanged friendly parting grasps with his companions. After many shakes and counter-shakes, the last “good night” was said; the key of the locker holding the tempting stores was handed to Mr. Wirkem by the reluctant John Hogg, who, however, took especial care to make himself a “snorter” beforehand; and that worthy individual betook himself to his hayloft, in a much better humour with himself and mankind than when he left it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTRODUCTION.

The following club-night all the members were present, but, contrary to Mr. Wirkem's anticipations, there was no addition to the number.

"I expected," said the old coachman, after a dense cloud of smoke had curled from his lips, "to have seen some more chalked-off mates here this evening, as one-eyed Jack has been as busy as a bee among flowers, going the rounds and advertising our meetings."

"Strike me fortenate!" exclaimed John Hogg, occupying his former position upon the bottom of the stable-pail; "I went to every house o' call I could think of, but not a dragsman out o' luck could I find. I think they

must all ha' laid violent hands on themselves. Howsomdever," continued he, with a shake of the head which heartfelt grief could alone produce, "the Brighton Rail opens next week, and then, oh Lor ! there'll be bushels on 'em cooked to tinder !"

"Ay," added the Vice-president, sipping his brandy-and-water, "we shall have some of the swells among us then. What a road that have been for broken-knee'd gentlemen !"

"Very true, Bill Johnson," observed Mr. Wirkem, "that road *has* been a favourite for well-bred Whips, and a finer set o' fellows never handled ribands. What's to become of 'em now God knows—I don't."

"Turn stokers, I 'spose," growled John Hogg ; "which purfession is wery like a dust-man's or some'at worse."

"Well," said Jacob Plywel, "they'll meet with a hearty welcome here, at any rate ; and, if they're down upon their condition, we'll try to put 'em up."

“ Well said, Jacob,” returned Mr. Wirkem, approvingly, “ that sentiment is the finger-post from all, I know.”

At this moment a slight, very slight tap was heard at the door of the apartment. John Hogg rose with alacrity from his seat, to answer the summons. “ Ah, old Buck !” he exclaimed, throwing open the door and dragging the person addressed into the room, “ I thought it might be you : tip us your mauler,” continued Jack, grasping the proffered hand of the stranger.

The appearance of Jack’s acquaintance attracted the attention of the assembly, and some partly-smothered exclamations of surprise were heard from various quarters.

He was a man who might have seen upwards of sixty winters. His hair was very gray, and his features thin and pale, except the extreme tip of his nose, which was a bright scarlet, evincing in its glowing colour his practical fondness for strong liquids. His

face was strikingly long, as if it had been drawn down habitually, either from playing the flute or the mute; and his eyes had that dull leaden look which brings to mind the bleared ones of a boiled fish. Upon the back of his head was stuck an old silk hat, so bent and worn that neither time nor friction could further add to its decayed condition. Round a long thin neck a yellowish white neckerchief was twisted, with its long ends left to dangle on the outside of a rusty black cloth coat, closely buttoned to his throat, excepting that here and there a fractured button-hole or absconded button rendered a fastening impracticable. Thick, long boots, apparently designed for "tops," but curtailed of their fair proportions, were pulled up and strapped to a pair of black velveteen breeches; and cotton gloves, formerly white, through which some of his fingers peeped, completed his unprepossessing costume.

"Mr. Wirkem, sir," said Jack, pointing to

his friend, "this is Joseph Wyper, commonly called 'Melancholy Joey.' He's a partickler friend of mine; and an old un too," continued Jack, while a bright spark glowed in his solitary eye; "for he got on my blind-side twenty year ago, an more."

Mr. Wirkem's sides became convulsed, and a loud laugh burst from the lips of the others. "Good, Jack, good!" exclaimed the old coachman, after his sides became settled. "Go on," continued he; let's know what coach Melancholy Joey drove, and then put him in a chair."

"It was a *Gravesend* stage, sir," replied Jack, placing much emphasis upon the name.

"A pair-oss, or a four-oss?" laconically inquired Mr. Wirkem.

"Sometimes one, and sometimes t'other," replied John: "that is to say," added he, "when he drove the pair it was a reg'lar built coach, but when he handled the four it was a sort o' wan."

A light seemed to break suddenly upon Mr. Wirkem's imagination. With a jerk he withdrew his pipe from his lips, and, laying it upon the table, he took a very slow and minute survey of Melancholy Joey's exterior. Upon his expansive feet Mr. Wirkem's eyes rested: gradually they were raised, until the dilapidated hat was examined. Then, and not till then, the old coachman's ribs again shook "like aspen leaves in a zephyr's breath." His face became as purple as a ripe mulberry, and it was very evident an internal cachinatory explosion had taken place.

An egg might have been boiled lightly ere anything like gravity was resumed by Mr. Wirkem. At length, however, he contrived to ease off the extreme pressure of his inward mirth, and in a sort of roar, mingled with laughter, he hallooed out, "D—n me, if he ain't a *Black-yard* dragsman!"

"Ha, ha, ha! oh! Mr. Wirkem, sir," exclaimed John Hogg, "you've clapped the

collar on the right oss, so help me Betsy Baker !”

The correctness of Mr. Wirkem’s statement thus being confirmed, caused another eruption in the old coachman’s capacious bosom, and a peal of ringing mirth from all the rest except the Vice-president, who looked gravity personified. At the conclusion of their boisterous laugh, which echoed merrily away far and wide, Bill Johnson rose hesitatingly from his chair, and looked towards Mr. Wirkem.

“Order! order!” shouted the President, tapping the table with the bowl of his pipe : “order for the Vice! Silence, you Tom Short, there, cork up for a little while,” continued Mr. Wirkem.

The required order being obtained, Bill Johnson, with a slight nervous cough and a perceptible quiver of the lips, commenced that trying ordeal for orators of every degree, a maiden address.

“Mr. President and gentlemen,” began he :

“I hate pride in all shapes, and I *do* think no man present or absent can say he ever saw in me what may be called a spice o’ vanity. But I’m one o’ those that think we should all keep our own natural seats, and not go and climb into other men’s boxes. Supposing I was to go to the House o’ Lords, and say to the chairman, ‘I’ve come to mount *your* dickey’ — (Hear, hear, hear! cheered Tom Short)—I say *supposing* I was to take that road,” continued the speaker, “shouldn’t I be out of my proper path and be a reg’lar trespasser?”

“To be sure you would,” replied Mr. Wirkem.

“I expected that answer from you, sir,” rejoined the orator. “And why should I be? Because,” continued he, “I couldn’t show no right whatever to be there: because my claim could not be backed by any legitimate rider: in short, because a very slight notice to quit, followed up by a kick in the rear, would to a

certainly be a successful and lawful mode of making my presence uncommon scarce in that company."

"Bra—vo !" shouted Jacob Plywel.

"There's no 'umbug about me," continued the speaker. "Still I'll not tamely sit down and see a man shove his nose into this Society, or have it shoved in by a proxy, which is one and the same thing, without raising my voice against the attempt. And without wasting any more wind, I mean to say this—Mr. Joseph Wyper, *a-li-as* Melancholy Joey, does not come within the meaning of our way-bill ; that he is not a proper coachman, and never was, and cannot be permitted to take a seat among us. The very name of our society proves what I say to be true. 'THE CHALKED-OFF DRAGSMEN'S FREE AND EASY' is what Mr. Wirkem christened it, and I should like to know *how* he proves himself one o' these. If he can, I'll touch my beaver ; but if he can't, I move that he be bowled out forthwith."

“ Mr. Wirkem, sir !” exclaimed John Hogg, angrily, scarcely being able to control himself from interrupting the speaker ere he sat down, “ I can prove ——”

“ Stop, John, stop !” said the President, waving his hand for Jack to maintain silence ; and rising with stateliness from his arm-chair, “ gentlemen,” said he, “ free discussion is the pole-chain of an Englishman’s liberties. Without it, in my opinion, we should run down hill in double quick time, and have an awful smash at the bottom, or perhaps before we got there. There will be always differences of opinion among us ; but still that is no reason why there should be anything like a screw loose about the springs of the heart ; nor should it be sufficient cause to raise the bristles of the temper.”

“ Ain’t he a wonder at a speech ?” whispered Jack to his friend.

Melancholy Joey gave a single nod of acquiescence, but kept his eyes bent sleepily upon Mr. Wirkem.

“The question before us,” continued the President, “is in a nutshell. It is one of our rules that *any* chalked-off dragsman, whether he may have been the driver of a pair-oss or a four-oss coach, shall, if he thinks proper, spread his legs under this mahogany. Well! now in the first place can this Mr. Joseph Wyper be considered a coachman? I think he can, on account of our not naming what colour the vehicle was to be, and there can be no doubt he has been in the constant habit of driving a black un. A coach is a coach, and must be considered as such, whether it be yellow, red, blue, or black.”

“But a hearse isn’t a coach, sir,” suggested the Vice-president.

“The machine wot the moaners ride in is though,” croaked Joey in a voice that resembled an antiquated rook under the influence of a bad cold.

“Well done, old Melancholy,” said Jack, giving his friend a smack of encouragement upon the back.

“And I’ve driv the mopers as often as the cold-meat wan,” continued Joey.

“That’s a stopper, and no mistake,” added Jack approvingly.

“You hear, gentlemen,” said Mr. Wirkem, “and, in my judgment, so much of the case is in favour of the candidate. Then comes the simple part of the business, how he proves himself to be chalked-off by the rail; for it was well understood such must be the condition of every one coming here as a member. If Mr. Wyper can support this remaining clause in our rules, I shall give him my vote; but if he can’t, it will be against him.”

Mr. Wirkem took his seat, while a murmur of applause fell from the lips of all save Bill Johnson, who felt that the President had been rather too partial an advocate for Melancholy Joey’s admission.

“Stand for’ard,” said Jack, pushing his friend towards the table. “Hold your head up, and speak out like a trump.”

According to Jack's suggestion, Melancholy Joey raised his chin, and began in a sepulchral voice the justification of his plea.

“I tell ye wot it is, sirs,” said he; “my master had a black yard for ten year, and his father had it afore him. I druv for the old governor five-an-twenty year, and at last druv *him* on his last journey. Well, sirs, his son took on to the business, and a very good un it was, for, do ye see, the jobs come in uncommon reg’lar in the darky trade, and I may say I was as comfortable under the young un for a length o’ time as under the old un. A slice o’ luck fell to the young master’s share soon after he started on his own account. The infulnzer and colery mob-us came into work, and if they didn’t box people up in pretty quick time, say I’m no judge. Our teams became real living skeletons from over-work; coffins, mutes, palls, and undertakers riz in the market wonderful. Howsomdever, things won’t always glide smooth. The vind o’ good

fortin often blows the plume o' feathers for just t'other way. I was drinking 'success to trade' the very last job I had to do with, and was on the point of mounting to drive the coach that the chief mopers was to ride in, when a pal, sirs, as was acting the mute on one side the doorpost, said 'Joey, I'm d—d if things ain't a little queer at home!' Says I, 'what do you mean, Bob?' Says he, "Blest if you don't see, when you get back to the yard agin.' A sort o' cold clammy feelin came over me when I heerd Bob say this, for he was as artful a card as ever put on a clarinet face at a job. I couldn't do nothin but think of his words the whole time I was a drivin, and once I put the prads into a sharp trot, forgettin, from want to learn the worst, where I was, and what I was a doin of. But to cut the matter short, sirs, I found, when we got home, every wan, coach, horse, harnesses, and all our traps of every kind, grabbed by the sheriff's bums. It was a awful blow

to my feelins, sirs, I assure ye. Five-an-thirty year I lived in that place. It was the only home I could remember ever to have had, and the only one I wished to keep. But ‘quit’ was the order and quick the motion. The next day master was made into a bankrupt.”

Melancholy Joey paused, and drew the cuff of his dexter sleeve across his eyes.

“Keep up your pluck,” whispered John Hogg; “don’t come the soft. Go on.”

But Joey was too much affected to proceed. He tried to swallow his sorrow by spasmodic gulps, but his gorge seemed to have swollen, and he could not get it down.

“Here, give him a drop o’ this, Jack,” said Mr. Wirkem, offering a glass of brandy-and-water bearing the colour of very dark mahogany.

“Take a stiff pull,” suggested Jack; “it’s a real choker to care.”

After the major part of the contents of the

glass had been drained by Melancholy Joey, a slight, very slight tinge of a smile flickered upon his features, like a sickly sunbeam through a thick November fog. The genial warmth of the strong mixture thawed the icy care at his breast, and, until he was reminded by a triumphant cough from Bill Johnson that his case required still further support, Melancholy Joey's thermometer rose ten degrees. But down it went again below zero, as his misfortunes were summoned to his memory again, and he looked the sorrow his tongue refused to tell.

"Now, Mr. Wyper," said the President, after sufficient time had been given him to regain his composure, "I suppose you've got something more to say."

"Time, Joey, time;" added Jack, giving him a friendly dig in the ribs with the end of a straightened thumb. "Come to the scratch, my tulip," continued he.

"A few more words 'll settle the job,"

groaned Joey. "Master had a trial, or a hexamination, or some'at o' the sort, before some gentlemen wot seemed to take uncommon partickler interest in his affairs, when it turned out he had been a spekulatin with all his money, and a good deal of other people's, in Railroad Companies, and the consekence was, sirs, ducks and drakes had been made with the tin. The rail gave him, as it has thousands of others, a nasty wipe in a tender spot, and, with many other innercent creeturs, I suffered for another's wrong-doin."

The speaker's voice wound up gradually, and, as he came to a full stop, his hand was clutched by John Hogg, who, after giving it a vigorous shake, exclaimed, "Put me up! but it was a top sawyer of a speech. Now, Mr. Wirkem, sir, worn't he chalked off by the rail?"

"Silence, John, silence!" returned the President, rising from his chair. "Gentlemen," continued he, "you have heard the

statement made by Mr. Joseph Wyper, which I think a very fair one, regarding his claim for admission into our Society. In my opinion, he has made out a clear case; but as others may not agree with me, perhaps our worthy Vice will divide upon the question."

"No, no, no!" said several voices.

"What say you, Bill Johnson?" inquired Mr. Wirkem, resuming his seat.

"As I see the majority is against me," replied the Vice-president rather in a sulky tone, "I shall not press the motion, but eat humble pie."

"And a good dish it is," added Jack, "with a beef-steak in the middle."

"Mr. Joseph Wyper," said the President, "you're installed one of us; an honour which, with one exception, we think *nem. con.* you're entitled to. Take a seat by the side of your friend Jack, and mix your liquor."

Close to the pail John Hogg drew an old rush-bottom chair from a dark corner of the

room. It was smothered with grey dust, and thick cobwebs woven from leg to leg showed many a night had passed since it had been drawn from its old quarters.

“There, old chap,” said John Hogg, giving the seat a bang with his broad hand, sending a cloud of dust in all directions, “bring yourself to anchor there, and lock yer wheels without more ceremony.” And, suiting the action to the word, he gave Melancholy Joey a push which sent him suddenly into the seat. Either time had rendered the rushes very rotten, or Joey’s weight was greater than it appeared to be; for no sooner did the honourable part of his person salute the chair, than through the bottom he crashed, bringing his knees close to his chin, and elevating his heels far above his head.

A roar of laughter followed this exhibition of Joey, and it was some minutes before Jack could recover sufficient strength, from his excessive mirth, to drag his friend from his lu-

dicrous and unpleasant position. In a short time, however, another seat was found, and Joey's inward man found great consolation in a large, round, fat-looking tumbler of grog, which John Hogg mixed with a very slight infusion of *aqua pura*.

When silence was restored, Mr. Wirkem observed, "As the call is with me, I require you, Jacob, to give us a song. I can't say I ever heard you tune up a stave; but ye have a singing face, so off ye go."

Jacob Plywel had been the driver of the Bath Era, and was a favourite with the old ladies who frequented that place to drink bitter water, deal out as bitter scandal, and play whist, for his urbanity of manners and superior behaviour. But Jacob was a wag, and after bowing an extra half-crown from the purse of one of his patronesses, it was no uncommon occurrence for him to laugh in his sleeve at the "old piece of muslin," as he would call her, and, winking his eye, ask

“ whether she was passed *ironing out* ?” Jacob’s person was tall and thin, and was generally decked in a bright green cut-away coat with large gilt basket buttons, very narrow and tight black trousers, with a long buff waistcoat reaching nearly to his hips. His hat was rather low in the crown, with a well turned-up brim, which, bending down behind and before, shaded features of the order denominated “ sharp.” His nose was narrow and aquiline, and barely served to separate a pair of small black eyes, bright and glowing as a snake’s.

“ I tell you this, Dick Wirkem,” said he, “ you’ve waked up the wrong passenger. I can’t—”

“ Ya-hip! what’s that I hear?” interrupted the President.

“ I beg your pardon,” replied Jacob, calling to memory that regulation of *can’t* and *won’t*. “ But, upon my word, I’m no songster,” continued he.

“ Do your best, and we shall be satisfied,” rejoined Mr. Wirkem.

“ All right then,” added Jacob ; and, in a tone which at once belied his assertion, he commenced in a manly voice the following words :—

How bright is the hour when Memory brings

The friends we have loved, and the past which has fled,
When from leaves that are scatter'd an odour she flings
More sweet when the flower is wither'd and dead.

Oh ! what were this world, if the love we have felt

In our happiest moments could never return
To rapture again the sad heart where it dwelt,
And dry up the tears it receives in its urn !

Thus is it in life, when the frown's on the brow,

And despair at the heart has silver'd the head,
That we love to look back to our earliest vow,
And murmur its spell to the name of the dead !

Though Hope with her dreams may bewilder the eye

Of those to whom pleasure has been but a vision ;
Though her heaven she steep in that varying dye
Which creates for the dreamer a world all Elysian ;

Yet Memory to me is dearer by far,
Though faded her brightness, though sadder her
dreams;
To the lover 'tis sweeter to worship one star,
Than kneel to a heaven of numberless beams.

“ Jacob Plywel,” said Mr. Wirkem, after the applause had subsided which followed the song, “ saying *I can't* to the first time of asking, in a woman is well enough. They like to jib a little, in order to make a start that'll send fire from flints. Pretty creeturs!” continued the old coachman, with a smile of admiration illuminating his features; “ it's their natur, just as it is for a ram to butt and a mule to kick. But for a *man* to come that Tom-Tit-and-Jenny-Wren-go, it's—upon my word it's—worse than brandy-and-water—”

“ Brandy-and-water!” exclaimed John Hogg, interrupting the President, while his one eye became as expanded as a full-blown sunflower: “ *worse* than brandy-and-water, Mr. Wirkem, sir!”

“ *Without* brandy, I was going to add, John,” rejoined the old coachman, “ only you’ve got a vicious trick of taking folks up before they’ve said their say.”

“ Beg pardon — but — Oh, Mr. Wirkem, sir,” roared Jack, “ *you*’ll never become a everlastin President of a Teetotalism-coffee-muffin-and-be-d—d Society, I know.”

“ Hush, John, hush !” returned Mr. Wirkem, reprovingly ; “ swear not in joy or in sorrow, in mirth or in pain.”

“ Very good, sir !” added Jack ; “ I’ll think o’ them words, partickerly when my corns are a achin ; for if ever I feel wishful to rap out a rum un, it’s on them occasions. Oh, Lor ! in wet weather how they do twinge !” said he, appealing for sympathy to his friend Melancholy Joey. But Mr. Wyper was too engaged with his own cares to pay the least attention to those of others. He sat with his chin upon his hands, and elbows resting upon his knees, gazing at the bright coals in the

grate. Here and there he saw old familiar scenes in the consuming fuel. A hearse was well shaped, and a coffin—never was a coffin better modelled. Pop—bang!—and out came the hollow mass with a whiz, just between Joey's legs. Fate winged the shaft. He would have grasped the red hot thing; but he valued his fingers. "Oh!" groaned Joey, and he thought of "the light of other days."

"Now, Dick Wirkem," said Jacob Plywel, "I think it's my turn."

"To be sure it is," replied the President, giving a very significant nod towards the Vice.

Jacob returned the signal, and said, "he should be glad to hear what Bill Johnson had to say."

Bill Johnson had not recovered his serenity of temper since the failure of his motion; but when he was singled out to narrate a tale, something like good-humour usurped the shade hovering upon his brow. In his glass was a small quantity of punch, and tossing it

off to the last drain, he rubbed his hands, crossed his legs, and looked cheerfully prepared for the task imposed.

“ I’m sure I hardly know what to tell,” said he, at the same time looking the contradiction of his assertion.

“ Let’s have a glass round first,” suggested Mr. Wirkem. “ Wet your whistle, Bill, my boy, before ye begin to blow.”

“ Ah ! Mr. Wirkem, sir,” added Jack, admiringly ; “ that’s a real fine rule, that is, an’ no two ways about it.”

“ Give us a toast or a sentiment, Dick, by way of a nut to our liquor,” said Jacob Plywel.

“ With all my heart,” responded the old coachman. “ Come, fill away. May the wheels of our friendship never rust or want greasing !” said he.

“ Hooray !” shouted John Hogg.

“ Capital, Dick—famous !” responded Jacob.

“ Silence for Mr. Vice,” suggested Tom Short, his right-hand companion.

After a “ hem” and a “ h-hum,” Bill Johnson commenced.

“ As most of ye know, I was Whip to the Gloucester Telegraph for fifteen year, and during one journey down I became acquainted with rather a strange story, relating to somebody who you must all have heard of.”

“ Who is that?” inquired Mr. Wirkem.

“ Jemmy Wood, the miser,” replied the Vice-president.

“ Let’s have it, by all means!” cried the President; and his Vice proceeded to relate the story which will be found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V.

MONEY.

It was just twenty year ago this very month, and a cold frosty day as ever numbed a fellow's bunch of fives, or froze his nose into an icicle, that I was tooling the team briskly along towards the old city of Gloucester. A sharp nor-easter blew in our teeth, and drove a thick sleet agin our faces, stingin 'em like hard peas from a peashooter. The snow laid upon the ground pretty thick, and here and there were large high drifts, which threatened to give us a diggin-match before we reached home. Three ins and four outs, with a little luggage, formed the load, so that we ran pretty light considering the state of

the roads. We had changed osses for the last stage, and got about two miles a-head, when a wide drift laid across the road, blown through a gate on the off-side, which rose somewhere about four feet in the middle. I pulled up a hundred yards before we came to it, and held a sort of council of war with myself as to what course I should take.

“ I don’t know, gentlemen,” said I, “ but I think we’re fixed.”

“ Pooh, pooh, pooh !” replied my mate on the box, a somebody clothed up to his eyes ; but there was a somethin about his hat, sirs, that told me at the start he was a Nob, although I could see no more of his shape, make, or condition, than a pig in a poke.

There’s a great deal more in a hat than most people think for. No gentleman can look like one without his thatch is of the right sort ; and no coachman can do credit to his seat if *his* tile ain’t comely and suitable. Supposin you see a narrow crown, and little

pinched-up brim, I'd bet a pound it covers a poor devil of a usher, parson, schoolmaster, or some such seedy individual. If you see a bell-top, with a brim turned half-way up, and stuck a leetle on one side of the head, that's a horse-dealer, coper, gambling-house swell, or one of the slang-cove tribe. Should it be no partiklar shape, but a reg'lar mongrel, and shoved on well behind, leaving the forehead bare as the back of your hand, you may set that chap down green as a spring cabbage—just one stage from a nateral jackass. But a gentleman's hat, although I know it when I see one, is almost out of the reach of *my* thong. It's neither too high or too low, too broad or too narrow; a somethin very partickler, yet not lookin so.

[Mr. Wirkem regarded his own hat upon the peg, and, conceiving that it fully answered the description of the latter, a smile of satisfaction illumined his features, while he added,

“Never mind the hats, Bill; go on with your story.”

“To be sure I will, Dick Wirkem,” replied the Vice-president, “so here goes.”] “Pooh, pooh!” says the gentleman (that’s where I was, isn’t it?)—

“You may pooh, pooh, sir,” says I, “but you’ll find I’m right.”

“Here, here, give me the ribbons,” said he, snatchin’ em from me, and shufflin’ them through his fingers like one who knew how. “There, now all of you get down, and I’ll take ’em through it.”

I didn’t much relish this proceedin, but there was somethin in his voice and way which kept me quiet. Without more ado, myself and the outsiders got down, and then he prepared to charge the drift, like the Blues did the French at Waterloo. Crack, crack, went the whip, and the gay little team spun forward at a splitting pace. Into the snow-bank they rushed up to their bellies. To the

collars they went, and tugged away like Britons. "Go it, my boys!" hallooed he, tippin em plenty of flax by way of encouragement. They had just got through the worst part, and I was thankin my stars for it, when down went the near-wheeler with his head clean under the pole, almost upon his back.

"There we are," said he, as the coach came to a sudden stop, "and no one's fault either. Accidents will occur in the best regulated families."

"So they will, sir," replied I; "but what are we to do now?"

"Do! get some spades," said he, throwing off his thick coat, and jumping into the drift, "and we'll dig the machine out in less time than it took the devil to scorch a feather."

After takin the osses off, and gettin the fallen one up, I started to get some assistance from a farm-house in sight. Shoulderin four spades, and the farmer, who was the only man

I could find, carrying three, we trotted back to the coach.

“Now then to it with a will,” said the gentleman-whip, takin a spade, and diggin away like a professional scavenger.

A good example often does wonders. I couldn’t expect the warm insiders to turn out and work; but all the outsiders I hoped would follow the leader, and so they did exceptin one. This chap stood by, muffled up to the eyes in an old red comforter, and didn’t offer to lend a hand.

“Come, sir, there’s a spade for ye,” said I, “if you’re inclined to give us a little help.”

He laughed at this for all the world like an old hen a-cacklin.—“I never,” replied he, “*give* any thing. If you want my help, you must *buy* it.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the gentleman-whip. “Ha, ha, ha! I thought it was him, and now I’m sure of it;” and then he roared again as if somebody was ticklin the soles of

his feet with a soft brush. "What, Mr. Wood!" said he, when he'd got the drag upon his haw-haw! "don't you know me?"

"Dear me! what! eh! bless me! I—yes, my Lord, certainly I—," and without sayin another word, Jemmy Wood, for it was he, started off at a brisk pace, as if he expected somethin unpleasant to follow him. First he looked over one shoulder, then he peeped over the other, and hurried away as fast as the snow would let him.

"Stop, sir!" said I.

"I've paid my fare," he hallooed back.

"But the coachman, sir, if you please!" returned I. But he only shook his head, and continued on. Then such another roar came from the lips of the gentleman-whip that I feared almost he'd break his wind.

"The same Jemmy Wood as ever," said he. "Well, well! go thy ways, Jemmy; old sores are healed with me."

“I had no thought it was him, sir—my Lord,” said I, correctin myself.

“Ay, *sir* will do as well,” replied he, shovelling away like a Trojan.

In a few minutes after this we managed to cut a clear passage through, and, clappin the tits on again, we bowled away towards home.

“Is Mr. Wood considered as rich as ever?” inquired the gentleman.

“Yes, my Lord,” replied I—for I felt he was one, although I didn’t know his pedigree.

“And how does he live now—in the same water-gruel, hard-crust, pick-bone way?” returned he.

“Just the same, I hear, my Lord,” said I, “although he’s got a mountain of money.”

“Is he charitable?” asked he.

“Not even to himself,” I replied; “he doesn’t allow the common necessities of life, even to himself.”

“The niggard!” exclaimed his Lordship; and then with a hearty laugh he added, “what a rival I had!”

These last words struck me as uncommon peculiar; but being spoken as if they were intended only for himself to hear, I held my tongue, although I wanted to give a hint as to the meanin of ’em.

It was gettin dusk as we approached the city: one by one the stars came out, and glistened like the foam of the sea in the harvest-moon.

“It will be a stingin frost to-night,” said I, “or my judgment’s on the wrong side o’ the road.”

“It looks and feels as if it would,” replied his Lordship. “I shall not go further than Gloucester this evening. Which is the best inn?”

“Where we stop; the old Booth Hall is, I think, as good as any of ’em,” rejoined I.

“There I stay then,” added he, “for it’s much too comfortless to travel on.”

“I wonder where generous Jemmy is?” said I: “we ought to have overtaken him before this.”

Just, however, as we got on to the stones, a return fish-van was in our way. “Now, then, ya hip, fishy!” hallooed I; and in that high-scentin machine, among a load o’ baskets, sat my runaway passenger that refused to fee the whip.

[“Those fellows never come to any good!” observed Mr. Wirkem, indignantly.

“Nor don’t ought,” chimed in John Hogg, with the fire of anger glowing in his eye: “they ain’t o’ the wally o’ the salt they eats,” continued he.]

Well! when we drew up at the hotel (resumed the Vice-president), there was a fine tall fellow, with a bow-window stomach, standin with a large ventilator, or cockade as some people call it, stuck on one side his hat.

As soon as he saw who was alongside o' me, he unthatched himself, and laid bare his mouldy poll; for he was greyer than any badger well could be. "How d'ye do, James? how d'ye do?" asked his Lordship, throwing the apron on one side, and preparing for a descent before we came to a dead stop; for he was the quickest I ever saw in his ways and actions.

"Quite well, thank ye, my Lord," replied the flunky, scrapin about the best bow he had in the boot, I expect.

"Keep on your hat, keep on your hat," rejoined his master; "it's much too cold for that ceremony."

After rippin open his coats — for he didn't take time to unbutton 'em—he forked out a sovereign, and said, "There, coachman, that'll do for myself and Jemmy Wood too," and, without waitin to be thanked, he bustled away.

["That's what I call acting *like* a nobleman," observed Mr. Wirkem.

“So it be, sir,” added one-eyed Jack, approvingly ; and, taking his glass, he mentally toasted the health of the liberal donor.

The Vice-president continued.] “If it’s no secret or offence,” said I to the slavey, “pray who is your master?”

“The Earl of Easterland, or Old Rapid, as he’s called,” replied the flunky with a good-humoured look.

“And a trump of the pack he is,” rejoined I, pocketin the blunt.

“You may well say that,” added the flunky, taking hold of the portmanteau.

“I never clapped eyes on a nimbler gentleman,” said I.

“And never will,” returned he ; “he’s a little *too* quick for some of us.”

With this he carried the luggage into the hotel, and I went to square matters in the bookin office.

After making all right, I went, as was my custom, into the kitchen to get a snack.

There's nothin like the kitchen to get one's dinner in if you're a favourite of the cook's. The nice little tit-bits she'll titivate up for ye; the sly spicy morsels she'll snig from the dishes goin to the customers; the table she'll put on one side o' the blazing fire, with a cloth spread over the backs of some chairs to keep the cold draught from your shoulders; then the way in which she looks down upon ye as you're grubbin away and smackin your lips, all smiles and good temper; it's enough to make a chap wish he was peckin away there for ever.

"Well, Betsy, my love," said I, in the most carneyin voice possible, as I entered the kitchen, and saw her fryin away all in a lap-dag heat, with a face as red as a scraped brick, "what's for dinner, my dear?"

"Pig's in'ards — chitlins," said she, givin the pan a shake up, which made the fat crack, snap, and fly in all directions.

"And a good dish it is, Betsy, my duck!"

rejoined I; "a fit one to set before a king. But am I to have company to-day?" inquired I, seein a couple of knives and forks set on the table.

"Yes, Mr. Bill," she replied; "but you needn't be afeard of disgracin yerself, for it's a Lord's gentleman wot's a-goin to chum nose-bags with ye."

"I don't care who is mate in a feed," said I, "so long as the spread's good and temptin."

"Stop you a bit," added she, givin the fryin-pan another fancy shake, and smilin only as a woman can do when she's tickled. "Ill make your tater-trap water."

There's nothin comes up to a little well-timed sweetnin, for the feminine gender. You may come over them unawares, and steal into the cupboard of their affections with the wheedlin key better than any other on the bunch.

"Betsy, my angel!" said I, creepin my arm round her waist, "I wants a sharpener to get

an appetite for the chitlins." With this I gave her such a buss on her lips that sounded like the flip from a new piece of whipcord.

"That's the sauce, is it!" said she: "take that for your imperence," givin me a box on the ear. But, Lor bless ye! it wouldn't have brushed a cobweb off.

"Come, come, I say—that's a pretty game enough *after* dinner," observed somebody close to my elbow.

Upon twistin round, which you may be sure I did in a short turn, there stood the flunky, grinnin like a hyena. Betsy dropped her head, and I dare say blushed; but her face was always a bright scarlet, so it made no difference in her skin. Then she giggled a little, and I laughed; then the flunky laughed, and at last we all roared away together.

"We are old friends," said I, givin Betsy a poke in the ribs with my thumb.

"So I suppose," replied the flunky.

"Don't you come that game agin," ob-

served Betsy, at the same time givin me a look as much as to say, “if you don’t, no more pig’s in’ards for you, my boy !”

Well—we—that is, the flunky and me—sat down and commenced operations in first-rate style. Betsy did her best, and topped up the bait with some of the neatest kickshaws that man ever put in the fore-boot.

“Now then,” said my grubbin mate, wipin his lips, stretchin out his legs, and givin a “ha” of satisfaction, “we’ll have some hot, stiff, and sweet.”

The liquor was brought, and, after Betsy had put on her Sunday cap, and mopped up a bit, we three sat down before the fire to enjoy ourselves. After a couple of glasses of rum-an-water, the flunky became uncommon talkative, and very agreeable. At last I happened to mention the circumstance of his master meetin with Jemmy Wood, and what took place between ’em.

My limbs, how that chap laughed ! twice as

much as his master, if possible. Now I can't abide to have a fellow haw-haw in my company without knowing the cause: and so, said I, "Perhaps you'll be good enough to say wot's in the wind that makes you neigh away in that manner."

"Certainly I will," replied he, droppin the skid on his laugh. "But only to think they met in that sort o' way!" and then he roared again like a full-grown bull. At length he pulled up short, and said, "It's rather a long story; but here goes for the start."

When my Lord was on the sunny side o' thirty I entered his service, a matter o' thirty year ago and more. He was then, as he is now, particular partial to quick movements, which have got for him the title of Old Rapid. I had been valet to him about a twelvemonth, when he commenced courtin the only daughter of his banker, the rich Mr. Wild of Temple Bar. She was as beautiful a young miss as you could wish to see, and, what was better

still, had one o' the heaviest purses of any heiress in England.

"James," said the Earl, one mornin, as I was mixin the lather to shave him, "I'm goin to be married."

"I'm glad of it, my Lord," replied I. "May I be so bold as to ask when?"

"Immediately — *instantly*," added he; which means, in a canter, I think — "before I'm shaved."

"Before you're shaved, my Lord!" exclaimed I.

"I'll settle it before, at least," returned he. "Get me a sheet of paper, pen, and ink."

In a crack a letter was written to the lady's governor, and I was ordered to take it, and wait for an answer.

To shorten matters, this letter was an application to the young lady's governor, for his consent and approval. Young miss herself had already accepted master, of course.

As I sat in the hall waitin for the answer, my heart beat wonderfully quick and loud;

and, somehow or other, I feared things were not goin on smooth up stairs, from the slammerin of a door now and then, and voices talkin loud and snappish.

In about half an hour, Mr. Wild, who might be about fifty year old, rather bald and grey, came runnin down with a letter in his hand, and his face as red as a Turkey-cock's. His lips quivered, and his voice shook as he said, "Are *you* the Earl's servant?"

"Yes, sir," replied I.

"Then give that letter to your master," rejoined he, shovin one into my hand, as if it burnt his fingers like a hot potato, and orderin the porter to open the door.

By all that's mournful, thought I, makin a quick get out, it's a dead failure, and no mistake; but I should like to see what the old codger has written. With this I tried to have a squint at the inside of the piece of stationery; but it was so folded, turned, and twisted, that I couldn't manage to catch a glimpse of a word.

“Don’t trouble yourself, sir,” said a soft female’s voice close to my ear; “I can tell you all about those contents.”

I came round, as you may suppose, in about the shortest turn I ever made in my life; and as I saw that I’d been discovered at a Peepin-Tom trick, by as neat a little wench as ever refreshed a fellow’s daylights, my face crimsoned up like a full-blown poppy, and felt as hot as a cinder from the regions below. She was rather short than otherwise, but as nice a shaped un as you’ll see in a twelvemonth. Her eyes were as blue as the sky on a bright spring mornin, and two large bunches of curls hung down her bloomin cheeks, as if they wanted to meet in a kiss upon a pair of the ripest-looking lips I had seen for many a day.

I stammered out somethin about “my anxiety to know how matters stood;” but it was a lame attempt at an excuse for the pryin, and all I got in return was a ringin laugh from her sweet lips.

“Listen,” she said, takin my arm in the most off-hand way: “I’ll walk with you, and talk at the same time; for I know full well your master is of the hasty sort, and is waitin for your return just as if the house was on fire, and you were wanted to put it out.”

“That you may be sure he is,” replied I: “but, if it’s not rude, may I ask who you are?”

“I am Miss Wild’s maid,” she rejoined; “trustee of all her important and unimportant secrets, confidential adviser, messenger, and general manager for the home department.”

“You must have quite sufficient on your hands, I’m thinkin,” returned I.

“Quite so,” she added, with one of her merry laughs, that sounded like the trilling of some wild bird or other. “But we have no time to lose,” continued she. “Now be all attention. I take it for granted that you are

already aware of the contents of the letter brought by you to Mr. Wild this mornin," said she, looking at me very sly out of the corners of her eyes.

I told her I was : for my Lord, you know, had as good as told me.

"The substance of the reply, which is carefully folded," she resumed, still diggin at me for peepin, "is this—'NO!' "

"Short, and anything but agreeable," said I.

"There are more words used," added she : "but they amount to nothin else."

"Hasn't the old file given his reason for refusin?" inquired I.

"Not the right one, if he's given any," replied she. "But in this letter," takin one from a snug little place in her buzzum, "the true cause is stated, and my young lady will, with myself, be greatly obliged if you'll deliver it at the same time you do the other."

“With all the pleasure in life,” rejoined I, pocketin the letter. “But if it isn’t askin too much, will you let me into the secret first?”

“Seein no objection,” returned she, “I will. Mr. Wild, you must know, is so rich that nobody could count his money in a whole year. Notwithstandin this, however, he thinks of nothing else but gettin more. Day and night his thoughts are of schemes to increase his riches. Whenever he speaks of anybody, its only of those who are rich, and likely to become more so. As to titles and honours, he laughs at all such “trash,” as he calls ’em. ‘Give *me* the aristocracy of wealth,’ he’s always saying to his daughter; ‘I admit of no other.’ Poor dear young lady! he does this because of the attachment between her and your master.”

“But my Lord is very rich,” said I.

“Not rich enough for Miss Wild, in her father’s notions,” she replied. “About three

months since," continued she, "a Mr. Wood from Gloucester was invited to dine at our house, and, from the particular attention paid to him by master, I knew he was one of the opulent kind. I learned that they talked of nothing else but shares risin and fallin, stocks, funds, companies, loans, and all manner of things relatın to money, and seemed to agree remarkably well upon all subjects. Scarcely a word was said to Miss Wild, although she was the only other person at the table, so engaged were they upon pecuniary matters.

" 'Well, my dear!' exclaimed her father, when his guest was gone, 'what do you think of my friend?'

" 'I really don't know, father, for he said so little that I could understand,' replied Miss Wild. 'But he appears to be a complete man of business.'

" 'Business!' repeated her father, rubbin his hands with glee. 'We could buy up half the Dukes and Lords in the kingdom.'

“You may judge of the astonishment of my young mistress when the very next mornin, at breakfast, her father proposed Mr. Wood as a husband for her. ‘Our united wealth,’ said he, ‘will be unequalled; and as for your dower, Mary, my sweetest love, it shall be half a million.’

“The indignation in her pretty face was a sufficient reply. ‘Do I hear correctly?—am I in my senses?’ she at length said.

“‘It *is* enough to bewilder the brain of any girl—half a million!’ exclaimed he; ‘only think—a dower of half a million!’

“‘Father, you mistake me,’ replied my young mistress. ‘I would not be sold to *any* man for ten times the world’s weight in gold. No; I would sooner marry a penniless beggar of my choice.’

“‘Faugh! talk not to me of beggars,’ replied Mr. Wild, in a towering passion; ‘but say you will conform to my wishes?’

“ ‘Not to this,’ rejoined his daughter: ‘I cannot—will not, father.’

“ ‘That glitterin bauble of a coronet dazzles you,’ added Mr. Wild, clenchin his fists and stampin with rage. ‘But mind my words—nothing earthly shall wring from me a consent to the union.’

“ ‘Then,’ replied my mistress, with haughty pride, ‘it shall take place *without* your consent.’

“ ‘Not if mortal means can prevent it,’ returned her father. ‘To your room: reflect ere you repeat that threat.’

“On this same day it was the design of your master to have applied in form for Mr. Wild’s approval to become his son-in-law; but my mistress despatched a letter informing him of what had occurred, and it was decided to postpone the application to a more auspicious period. However, neither time nor reason effected any change. Mr. Wild remained bent upon his object, and his daughter equally

decided upon hers. When his Lordship called, and was unluckily seen by her father, he treated him with a degree of coldness which almost amounted to an affront. At length, no improvement taking place, the young couple have determined to become united without consulting any longer the wishes of Mr. Wild, and, that he may have no cause of complaint of his formal consent not being asked, it was demanded this mornin in the letter you brought, and, as you may suppose, is most positively refused in the one you now carry."

"What an unreasonable old bear!" said I.

"Now you know the full particulars of the whole affair," continued my pretty informer, as we arrived at the door of our house in Park Lane.

"Not quite," returned I. "What has Miss Wild said in this sweet-smelling note?"

"That I don't know," replied she: "it was written in such a hurry that I had no time to inquire."

“Then takin everything into consideration, I suppose we’re going to have a runaway match,” observed I.

“Not a doubt of it,” she replied, “if we can get a start. But master is so watchful and suspicious that I fear we shall not be able to manage it.”

“Leave my Lord alone for that,” rejoined I. “I’ll bet a year’s wages he does it somehow or other.”

“Pray Heaven he may!” added she; “for I quite long for the fun.”

The Vice-president paused in his narration, and, taking a glass from the table, nodded significantly to Mr. Wirkem.

“Ay, Bill,” observed the old coachman, “take a sup to wet the road a little, and then flank ’em up again. Jack,” continued he, “let’s have a little more light from the mutton fats.”

John Hogg’s natural snuffers were applied

to the long-wicked and flaring candles with brightening effect, and after each one had been topped by his finger and thumb, he resumed his squatting posture upon the pail, to listen in profound attention to the continuation of the story.

CHAPTER VI.

MONEY AND MATRIMONY — THE VICE - PRESIDENT'S STORY CONTINUED.

Well! when I delivered the letters to my master, and he had read them (continued the flunky), his antics were much like a parched pea upon a drum-head. Down went one under his feet, and, while he trampled upon it with the same action of a dancin bear upon hot tiles, he kept a-kissin the other all the same as though it was a pair of red rosy lips poutin for a buss.

“It shall be done,” he hallooed out at last, in a voice between a bull-bitch and a quaker’s: “it shall be done, James, this very night.”

“Yes, my Lord,” I replied; but *what* was

to be done still remained a subject for speculation on my part.

After considerable walkin up and down the room, kickin over a chair or two, pokin the fire clean out of the grate, scratchin his head as though it wasn't his own, and rubbin his nose all over his face, I had orders to get four posters in the travellin carriage by twelve o'clock that night, and to be waitin, with the boys in their saddles, at the corner of a particular street until he came.

I now began to smell fish very strong. A boltin match, is it! Ha, ha! how pleased I was, to be sure; a flea in my ear couldn't have tickled me more.

It appeared, from what I was told afterwards, that a party was given in Grosvenor Square on this evening, to which Miss Wild, her governor, and my master, were invited. What arrangement took place there between the young lady and my Lord, or how it was managed, no one ever heard; for the suspi-

cious old father kept his eyes and ears so up to trap, that neither could say a word, or give a look without his bein down upon 'em like a hawk upon a chicken. I believe, however, the business was done by a third party, a sort of go-between, in the shape of a young married lady, a particular friend of Miss Wild.

Instead of keepin servants and horses shiverin in the cold, as now-o'-days, it was the custom then for ladies to be trotted home from balls in sedan chairs. About midnight Miss Wild popped into hers, and was carried briskly away from the dance, closely followed by her father on foot. The runnin footmen flared their torches in front to clear the road, and had nearly arrived at the end of their journey, when a sedan was seen comin towards 'em in a very narrow street. The side-walk was not sufficiently wide for both the chairs to pass on it, and the question was which would give way. Neither swerved an inch

from a direct course, and amid the hootin and swearin of the runners, the sedans came together with a devil of a bump. A laugh was heard from both the occupiers of 'em, as they clashed together with a noise which shewed no fender was between 'em, and then came the tug of war. Powder, curls, and wigs flew in all directions, as the footmen and chairmen rushed at each other with the fury of rams and bulls. Coats were ripped and torn from skirt to collar. Cravats were dragged from necks, and laced hats floated in a neighbouring kennel. Crimson blood trickled from flattened noses, and blue eyes were turned to black. Torches were dashed recklessly into each other's faces, singeing well-cultivated whiskers, begrimin and scorchin all they touched with their pitchy blaze. So the fight continued, until all engaged got well thrashed, and then peace was proclaimed by general consent.

At the commencement of the row, Mr. Wild

was hustled by two strong footmen to the opposite side of the street, and there detained, sorely against his will, by being pushed from one to the other in rather a rough manner, but without doing him any injury.

“Ye rascals!” he exclaimed, “let me go. Ye shall rue this conduct to me. Let me go, I say, ruffians!”

“No, no, master,” they replied: “fair play for ever. Our mates are equal to your number. Let them fight the bout out.”

At the conclusion of the scrimmage, Mr. Wild, almost throttled with rage, ordered his chairmen to go on, and he was obeyed accordingly. But when they opened the chair at home to let the young lady out, lo and behold, the bird had flown!

To see the old gentleman caper and kick at this discovery beats all description. He at once saw that he had been duped by the got-up fight, and recommenced it himself by breakin his cane over the heads of his ser-

vants, who scampered off like rats to their holes.

Now it so happened that Jemmy Wood was a visiter in the house at this time, and an eye-witness of his friend and intended father-in-law's discomfiture. He quickly learned how matters stood, and became little less enraged at the loss of "so good a bargain," as he called his love affair.

"The stock's down cent. per cent.," whined Jemmy.

"D—n the stock, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Wild: "a chaise-and-four. Ten pounds for him who'll bring me a chaise-and-four in ten minutes."

Out came Jemmy's watch from his fob, and, without waitin for his hat, away he bustled to a stable-yard close by. By dint of bribes in small sums, and threats of not takin the chaise unless prepared within the allotted period, he managed to get it at the door just in time to gain the money, and 'tis said he asked

for a cheque previous to Mr. Wild starting. This, however, I wouldn't swear to.

An old watchman, lame with one leg, and muffled up in a large great coat, with a night-cap pulled close over his ears, had just yawned out "past one o'clock and a cloudy mornin'," when I saw my Lord come runnin along with a young lady tucked under his arm. The door of the carriage was open, the steps were down, and into it they bundled neck and crop.

"Where to, my Lord?" said I.

A pant and a rattle came from his throat: he couldn't speak, but pointed to the North. I twigged the movement, and seizin a handful of notes and gold, which he thrust towards me, gave the order to the boys, slammed the carriage-door, and was climbing into the rumble when a tap on my shoulder brought me to.

"Stop one instant, Mr. James," said a sweet little musical voice; "give my mistress

this cloak and bonnet, for she has nothin but a wreath of roses on her head, and I'll take a seat beside you."

How delighted I was! There stood my charmer of the mornin, equipped for the journey, lookin like a startled fawn — all smiles and beauty. It was but the work of a moment to throw the toggery into the carriage, and to assist my ladybird into the seat. My foot was scarcely off the wheel, when away we started, makin the fire fly from every flint we touched as the tits dashed along the deserted streets.

"Deary me!" said my beauty in the rumble, "I really fear that I shall be jolted out."

"Never fear," I replied, puttin my arm round her waist, and pressing her close to me. "There, it must be more than a mortal shake to jumble you out now."

It was now the middle of summer, and soon after we reached the Great North road the clouds began to disperse, and a ray of

light shot itself along the border of the East. A thick gray mist hung upon hill and dale, loading every bough and leaf with moistening drops. Spiders' webs were thrown from twig to twig across the road, and tickled our noses as we snapped the meshes in our course. Every now and then the glimmer of a glow-worm's lamp, fainting in the light of the early dawn, told of the coming day.

“Faster, faster!” hallooed his Lordship, sticking his head out of the window. “Two guineas each, remember, for the stage.”

Whip and spur answered the order. On we rolled at an increased rate.

“Give it 'em, give it 'em!” continued my Lord: “we mustn't study horse-flesh to-day.”

The lads did their utmost to get the best pace out of their nags, and backed his Lordship's impatience by making the whipcord snap and crack again. But it being so early, the turnpike-men were asleep, and, when we

changed horses for the first two stages, the ostlers and postboys had to be called from their beds, so that we lost some time at the start. I never shall forget my Lord when we changed. I think I see him now jumpin out of the carriage and workin with heart, hand, and voice, to get the horses to. I was ordered to scatter money about as though it was handfuls of barley, and not worth the trouble of pickin up. And then the rosy-cheeked lass behind would reach forward, and hand bottles of scent, salts, and all manner of crinckum-crankums to her mistress, to cheer her up, and quiet her nerves. Scarcely was the last buckle tongued when off we shot again, amid the hoorays of the lads and helpers for our safe journey to GRETNA.

[“Ah!” exclaimed Mr. Wirkem; “and they were ready enough to give the old governor a similar cheer when he came up.”]

“No doubt of it, Mr. Wirkem, sir,” observed John Hogg. “I know well enough I should.”

“That isn’t an honest part to act, though,” rejoined the old coachman.

“Honesty be d—!”

“Hush, John, hush! Softly, my lad, softly!” added Mr. Wirkem, reprovingly.

“Well, sir!” continued John, “what I mean to say is this — honesty in matters o’ business is all my eye and Betty Martin. I should like to know wot trade could stand if honesty held the ribbons? Mr. Wirkem, sir,” continued Jack, in the tone of one knowing *what’s what*: “the hopposition of willany, like the railroad hells-in-harness to the genuine four-oss drags, would knock the consarn off the road in less time than it takes a woman to change her mind. That’s *my* opinion, sir.”

“Well, well! perhaps you’re right, John,” replied the old coachman. “But come, Bill,” continued he; “we’ve interrupted your story. Go on, my boy.”

The Vice-president had taken advantage of the interruption, by paying deep devotion to

his glass, and seemed any thing but displeased at the opportunity. After a "hem" to clear the pipes, he resumed his tale.]

It was broad daylight (continued the flunky) when we reached the third stage, and, as we rattled through the towns and villages, people stared at us with wonder, and seemed quite bewildered. Children ran and screamed after the carriage, curs barked, and such a cloud of dust rose from the ground that nothing could be seen in our rear ten or twelve yards off. Thus we continued to proceed, without much alteration in affairs, until after the fifth stage, when in descending a steep hill, about a mile from the place where we changed, the near trace of the off-wheeler got under a fore-leg, and almost threw him down. However, the postboy managed to keep him on his feet, and at the bottom of the hill brought us to a stand-still.

"What's the matter?" inquired my master.

"All right in one moment," replied the lad.

“ Right or wrong — go on,” passionately exclaimed his Lordship.

“ *Di*-rectly, sir,” returned the lad.

It was hardly the work of half a minute to get the carriage rolling again at its former pace ; but scarcely had the horses got into full stretch, when—sea and earth !—I caught a glimpse of a chaise-and-four just on the brow of the hill, streaking down it like lightning from a thunder-cloud. In a moment I guessed who was inside it, and callin to my Lord, I pointed out the chaise to him.

“ By Heaven !” he exclaimed, with his eyes ready to spring from their sockets, “ he’s upon us. Boys, ride for your lives ! A hundred pounds for ye if that chaise is distanced.”

The lads stood in their stirrups and flogged their horses like a couple of mad devils. A little increase of pace was got, but I saw it was no use. Weight was against us ; hand over fist the chaise was comin up.

“ Oh ! my dear young mistress ! ” sobbed my pretty mate in the rumble ; “ what shall we do ? She ’ll be locked up for evermore, poor young lady ! ”

I tried the consolables ; but she didn ’t stomach ’em, and commenced cryin for all the world like a smacked babby.

Now Miss Wild, with a face as white as a bled turnip, took a peep out o ’ the window, and then with a loud groan, which sounded like the tap of a drum, seemed to fall back in a sort of faintin fit. What a quandary we were in ! Flogging, fainting, storming, crying —such a rumpus I never witnessed before or since.

“ Where ’s the key of the pistol-case ? ” asked his Lordship, again putting his head out of the window, with his eyes flashin and his lips quiverin with rage.

“ Oh, my Lord,” I replied, “ don ’t murder ’em.”

“ Where ’s the key, I ask ? ” he roared

out in a voice few men would dare to disobey.

“ In the right-hand side-pocket,” returned I, in one of the most awful sweats that ever steamed out of a fellow’s skin. “ There’ll be bloody murder now, and no mistake,” said I, wishin myself any where but in the rumble o’ that machine. Cryin and squeezin to me like a scared child, the maid kept moppin up her tears, and sayin all manner of short prayers for our deliverance ; but seemingly to no purpose, for not a yard did we gain from our chasers. On they came flogging and spurring, and it was clear that the next hill, which was now in sight, would be the spot where we must be overtaken.

Every now and then my Lord took a survey of the enemy’s approach, and once I caught a glimpse of the muzzle of a pistol in his left hand.

“ Death and the devil ! ” exclaimed I, standin up and wavin my hand backwards :

“keep off, if you value your lives. For God’s sake, keep off!” I bawled with all my strength of wind. But the only reply I got to this warnin was a “Haw, haw, haw!” from the lad on the leader.

A laugh, thought I, is often turned into a blubber; just for all the world like the sun in April boxed up in a giffy by a cloud.

As I suspected, our horses were turnin a corner to mount the hill, when the leaders in the chaise were not more than six yards from our hind-wheels. I saw Mr. Wild’s face spread all over with delight, and there, sittin alongside of him, who should I see but Jemmy Wood, taking a pinch of snuff. A few strides further and their horses’ heads were close to our carriage-window.

“Stop, ye villains!” cried the old governor, shakin his fist at us.

Scarcely were the words from his lips, when a roar from my master’s pistol sent my heart clean into my throat: down went the near

leader with a whistlin bullet crashin through his brain. A cloud of dust—the heels of the postboy well up in the air—and a runaway horse that had snapped his traces, was all we afterwards saw of them.

Sir, I couldn't speak for some handful of seconds after this proceedin, but sat lookin at my little mate like a suckin pig stuck with astonishment; and she, to speak the truth, was not much better off. A hearty laugh pealin from inside the carriage, however, brought us to our senses. A sort of promiscuous sensation operated on both of us; for whether her arms went round my neck first, or mine round hers, I can't say.

“ [A neck and neck affair, I suppose,” observed Mr. Wirkem: “ a sort of dead heat.”

“ Perhaps so, sir,” continued the Vice-president.]

Certain it was, that we had such a huggin match as is seldom to be seen in a rumble. On our return from the Green in the far



Samuel D. & S. S. S. S.

"Down and the new leader with a whistle"

North, where my Lord and lady were made one, we learned that Mr. Wild stormed like a bedlamite when the horse was shot, and tried by all means to prevail on the lad to go on with the pair. But, "No, no," said he, "I'll have no more to do with 'em. Where there's one barker there's generally another at its heels, and he *might* pink the rider instead of the oss next time."

However, what persuadin he used I know not, but this I know, he did contrive to come on somehow or other, but didn't arrive till the ceremony was concluded; and master and his fair bride, finding he was close at their heels, actually jumped into bed with their clothes on: and so they were "wedded and bedded."

And now to sum up. Mr. Wild, findin himself floored, took quietly the bolus that was crammed down his throat, and behaved like a gentleman, never havin cause to regret the bullet that carried its billet. My companion in the journey became, without much

persuasion, Mrs. James Morgan, and Jemmy Wood returned to Gloucester to increase his store, but determined to have no more "bargains in matrimony."

Here finished the flunky's tale.

"But," said I, continued the Vice-president, "did your master and Jemmy Wood never meet again until to-night?"

"Not to my knowledge," he replied.

Our glasses were empty, and takin leave of each other, I gave Sarah a leary look, and thus we separated for the night.

At the conclusion of the Vice-president's narrative, John Hogg was about making an observation; but from the sparkle in his bachelor eye, Mr. Wirkem anticipated some improper innuendo, and checked the expression. Jack, however, would not allow it to be lost upon the entire assembly. Whispering a few words into the ear of his friend Melancholy Joey, he gave that individual a facetious

poke in the ribs, and broke forth into a loud "Ha! ha!" Mr. Wyper seemed to ponder upon the secret communication, and then the shadow of a laugh for a moment flitted across his features, but of so faint a nature that no trace was left behind.

The candles in the hoops were flaring with long wicks, and the fire wore a dull and hollow appearance, when John, unbidden, rose from his pail and commenced the work of renovation.

"Well, gentlemen," said the President, "we've heard Bill's story, and a very nice un it was. Suppose we wind up the night with a song and a toast."

"Not a bad move," replied Tom Short.

"With your leave, Dick Wirkem," observed Jacob Plywel, "I'll move an amendment."

"Certainly, Jacob, certainly," replied the old coachman.

"Then supposin, sir, we have a glass *now*, so as to make the song like a piece of pork in a sandwich," rejoined Jacob.

John Hogg paused, in the act of topping a candle, to rub his knees with unequivocal pleasure at this suggestion.

“I dare say your amendment will be carried without a division,” added the President, filling his glass.

“No doubt of that, Mr. Wirkem, sir,” said John Hogg; “at any rate, I shan’t offer no objections,” continued he.

“Now, Tom Short,” said Mr. Wirkem, “we’re loaded and primed; just put the match to the touch-holes.”

“Well, gentlemen,” observed the individual addressed, “here’s Coaching, Grog, and Women. May the man that doesn’t love all three in season never taste the joy of either!”

“Mr. Short,” said one-eyed Jack emphatically, and raising his glass high above his head; “you’re a hangel;” and with this brief but high-flown compliment he drained its contents to the last drop.

When the clatter of the glasses had ceased,

the President eyed the surrounding company with a scrutinizing look, and having caught the attention of his friend opposite, he made a slight movement with his pointed thumb towards John Hogg. A wink from Bill Johnson was the equally silent but indicative response.

“I think it’s my turn now to call for a stave,” observed he; “so I call upon John Hogg to tune up.”

Perhaps a blush never glowed in the cheeks of one-eyed Jack until this moment: but now one of the deepest dye mantled over his face, like a girl in her bashful teens hearing for the first time praise of her beauty. He rubbed the dexter cuff of his long-sleeved waistcoat across his lips, fidgeted on his lowly seat, cast a look full of doubts and fears towards his patron, and then said, “Mr. Wirkem, sir, I’ve a good mind to try one of my own makin.”

“Do, Jack, do,” replied the President, expressing by his manner great approbation at

John Hogg's forthcoming attempt at composition.

Regaining his natural composure, which fitted him like his skin, Jack "gave mouth" to the following lines:—

I'll sing you a plummy song, made by a plummy pate,
Of as rum a go as any cove can have heard of late ;
'Tis all about some nervous folk in a devil of a shake,
Thinkin there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake—
Thinkin there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake.

Some in a hurry started off to wherry and to funny,
And others couldn't get away 'cause for want of money ;
In a boat some rushed to float from danger so impendin,
Findin in *Gravesend* a hope from swallowin latter endin—
All a thinkin there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake.

Husbands took a partin hug from snortin snuff'n wives,
For squeez'd they were about to be from their precious
lives ;
To-morrow would not dawn on them — upon it they
ne'er would wake,
For bolted they were sure to be by the rattlin earth-
quake—
For bolted they were sure to be by the rattlin earthquake.

To the Nassau balloon some went to get a lift into the air,
But found Green and his little ones already puffed up
there,

Which caused growlin about the proceedin bein unfair,
As the public thought for them he first should have a
care—

All a thinkin there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake.

To Primrose Hill some went to fill their cup of curiosity,
Hopin in their hearts to see the city in adversity,
Also the overthrow of the London University—
A thinkin there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake,
All thinkin there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake.

In droves the people hurried off by railroad, coach, and
wan,

And those who couldn't ride, tried the marrow-bone
plan ;

In heel, head, and voice, agreein to a man,
There was goin to be a rattlin earthquake—
That there was goin to be a rattlin earthquake.

But errors will occur in families the best reg'lated ;
The Queen had company, as the Court Newsman stated,
So there couldn't be the shake as some old woman fated,
As it would be inconvenient for the guests to be pros-
trated.

And so after all there was no rattlin earthquake—
And so after all there was no rattlin earthquake.

At the finish of John Hogg's song, he met with a burst of applause, which vibrated and echoed through the old inn like a small park of artillery. Rats and mice skipped to their chosen retreats with fright lodged in every tail. Even an amatory cat upon the stable roof ceased "to render night hideous" by his tortured screams, and crept with stealthy step from the vicinity.

"Time's up, my boys !" said the President, looking at the dial from his poke. "Now for the stirrup-cup."

After the parting glass — "the fullest, the saddest of any"—was drunk, the last "Good night" was spoken, and "the right merrie companie" separated to meet again.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SLEEPWALKER.

The night was pitchy black, and the winter's wind swept along in howling gusts, jarring casements, and making old doors rattle on their time and rust-worn hinges. The houseless wanderer and outcast, attenuated by disease and want, friendless and forgotten, drew the rags closer to her person, and huddled shrinking to the corner, where Pity's eye neglected to cast a passing look. The faint ray of a star, occasionally streaking through the murky darkness, added by its contrast to the cheerless scene. Masses of heavy clouds scudded before the gale, and all without looked comfortless and wretched.

What a contrast the club-room presented ! There, as usual on the evenings prescribed, sat Mr. Wirkem, with his fat, smiling, round, plum-pudding face, looming through the misty veil of thick tobacco-smoke, surrounded by his merry boon companions, and resembling Bacchus at a revel, but with the desirable improvement of a far more strict regard to decency of attire, and nicer observance in the behaviour of his associates. A blazing fire threw its glowing warmth on the dark walls and still darker ceiling, and the hoop of flaring candles had just been topped by the efficient natural snuffers of John Hogg. Bottles, glasses, pipes, a huge bag of lump sugar, lemons, spoons, and grog-pestles, stood in thick array upon the polished mahogany ; while, flanking its lengthy sides, sat a greater number of “right merrie folk” than had assembled since it formed the festive board of “the Chalked-off Coachman’s Free and Easy.” In his wonted position, upon the pail, John

Hogg squatted, and his friend Melancholy Joey occupied a chair close to him. Songs had been sung, toasts drunk from bumpers "full and fair," healths pledged, sentiments given, and the relish of a roar just concluded, when the President stilled the remains of the mirthful storm by tapping the table with the end of his pipe.

"Gentlemen," said he, rising, "as I predicted, our numbers have increased now, from the cause which brought us together, in the first instance, under this way-bill—the opening of a rail."

One-eyed Jack clenched his fists, and, looking at the farthest corner of the room, seemed to have a mental vision of some obnoxious railroad personified; for, squaring in an attitude which prize-fighters of celebrity might imitate to advantage, he drove right and left into the unresisting air; and, perchance, seeing in his mind's eye the flooring of an adversary, a triumphant expression spread itself

over his features, and he again offered a willing ear to Mr. Wirkem's address.

"We have now some of the tall, tip-top dragsmen from the Brighton road among us," continued the President; "and although it's almost enough to fracture one's heart to learn that such coaches and osses as the *Age*, *Era*, *Beaufort*, and *Dart*, are chalked off, it's a little drop of consolation and comfort to know their crack Whips are not marked with the same paint—that is, no more to be seen or heard of."

"Hear, hear, hear!" exclaimed Tom Short.

"I know, gentlemen," resumed Mr. Wirkem, "that my proposal will meet with a warm reception, and, as it requires no soft soap to make it slip easy, I'll to the collar at once. Supposing we fill to our new comers, and may they never know the want of a pull by the trace of friendship!"

Long and loud was the burst of applause which followed this sentiment. The hurrahs loaded the air until it trembled with the vi-

brations. “Three times three and one cheer more” were repeated so often that no one appeared to have studied the simplest arithmetical rule.

At length, Richard Banbury, the *ci-devant* driver of the *Era*, got upon his legs, accompanied by the rest of the Brighton Whips, and this movement occasioned perfect silence. Not a whisper passed as he returned thanks for himself and friends in a brief but pithy speech; and, as they again settled themselves in their chairs, the glasses clinked and leaped from the table with the hammering of knuckles and other strong indications of enthusiastic welcome.

The speaker was a thin, tall, handsome man, bearing the stamp of having seen better days—a something which scarcely can be described, but is never to be mistaken. Honesty and good humour sparkled in his clear blue eyes, while a furrow on his brow, and deeply-lined cheeks, told that the hand of Care had been carving there. The expression

of his features was, "I can forget my own sorrows to be happy with you." His hands were strikingly delicate, and his long taper fingers evinced no marks of ever having performed a menial's office. Without the least peculiarity in dress, there was a neatness, and at the same time a careless arrangement about it, which showed the wearer's feelings perhaps as much as any outward index of the inward springs.

"It has been often said," observed he, taking his seat—"but that is no reason I should not repeat the old saw—a volunteer is better than two pressed men."

"No doubt of it," replied Mr. Wirkem.

"Then, as you agree with me," he returned, "I'll volunteer a stave;" and, without heeding the compliments which were showered upon him for his unaffected offer, he began, in a soft, flute-like voice, these words:

Here am I at my journey's end,
And now I'll rest awhile,

To quaff and laugh with each jolly friend,
To smoke, to joke, and smile.

If tell-tale sorrow has dimm'd mine eye,
And veil'd the sunny earth,
We'll smother every mournful sigh
By joyous shouts of mirth.

Let others sing of the cloudy past,
In tones all sad and low ;
I'll breathe no whisper here to cast
A thought of long ago.

To cull from life her brightest flowers,
May be the task of some ;
To dwell on grief's sad lonely hours,
And think of nought but gloom.

But here shall spring gay thoughts of pleasure,
Our cups to wreath with glee ;
Song and jest alone shall measure
The minutes as they flee.

Continued clapping of hands and stamping of ponderous feet followed this song. John Hogg, in his raptures, gave Mr. Wyper a squeeze of the dexter thigh with an iron grasp, that forced a croak of anguish from his

friend's throat, and a ludicrous expression of pain from his unfavoured features.

"There's music, Mr. Wirkem, sir!" exclaimed Jack, laughing. "No old raven with the invluenzer could beat Melancholy Joey. I'd back him agin a methodist parson at a singin match any day, and give odds too."

Mr. Wirkem smiled at Jack's observation, but made no reply. After a few minutes had elapsed, and there was something like a blank silence, the President gave one of his significant knocks for attention, and said, the call was with Bill Johnson, as, of course, a volunteer musn't be allowed to put a regular's nose out of place.

"In that case," returned the Vice, "I shall make play at Jacob Plywel's canister."

Jacob was lounging in a very careless attitude upon his chair; but, immediately upon hearing that he was the chosen one for the succeeding joint of diversion, he started from his posture of ease, and, casting his eyes upon

the centre of the table, seemed to be digging at his memory for the required subject.

“Come, Jacob, my lad,” said Mr. Wirkem encouragingly, after some time had been given for the start. “Squeeze your pod, and shell out,” continued he.

“I was conning over a few ideas, Dick,” replied Jacob, “before giving ’em rein. However, I think they may lead away now, and so here’s off.”

All eyes were turned upon Jacob, and feeling the gaze of observance somewhat more than his modesty could endure, a slight flush burned in his cheek, and his voice shook a little as he commenced his story.

I was formerly (began he) what is called a somnabulist.

“Is that cad to a *hominibus*?” inquired John Hogg.

“Hush, John, hush!” replied Mr. Wirkem: “you mustn’t interrupt.”

That is (continued Jacob), I used occa-

sionally to walk in my sleep. My poor mother tried all manner of manœuvres to break me of the bad habit. Sometimes I found myself soused to the chin in a tub placed close to my bed-side. Then I blundered over a pile of chairs, bruising my shins, and tapping the claret. Not unfrequently I startled every body within hearing, by sending the warming-pan in a clatter down the stairs, as the good old soul insisted upon stretching it across the banisters, by way of alarum to my nightly rambles. But every remedy that was tried failed. I continued to walk, and disturb all under the same roof with me from their peaceful slumbers, and should, in all probability, have done so to this day, had not the occurrence happened which I am about telling ye.

It was a sunny morning in May, just six years ago, that I was slapping the steam along at a merry pace towards London. A shower had laid the dust, and made the wild flowers on the banks and the hedges smell

more sweetly than new-mown hay. Not a bird that could sing but was piping away at the full stretch of his lungs, and buzzing insects made the air hum with their beating wings. From blossom to blossom the careless butterfly flitted, sipping the sweets from the loaded cups. Warbling in wild delight, the soaring lark rose with trilling notes, and then stooped to earth again like a streak of light. All Nature was rejoicing in the young summer's smiles. Not a thing but looked happy. The glad laugh of playful children echoed in the soft fanning breeze, and the snatch of some old ballad rung thoughtlessly from the lips of the peasant. I revel in such mornings. They thaw the frigid icicles of the heart, and render us fraught with compassion and good-will towards our fellows. Selfishness gives place to generous impulse, and the dark specks of our faulty natures become obscured in the light of exquisite sympathy.

We had just climbed a stiffish hill in our third stage when I was hailed by a party in a garden belonging to a farm-house. There were about twenty of them collected before the gate, and all rigged out in their best harness, laughing, giggling, and a few of the men staggering under as much liquor as could be carried in an upright form. A fiddler was scraping away in the ivy porch, and, from the large cauliflower-looking favours stuck upon every body, I knew it was a wedding party.

“Have you room, coachman?” inquired an antiquated dame, just half way between laughing and crying.

“Two ontsides,” I replied.

Then a wheelbarrow full of trunks, band-boxes, and all manner of bundles and baskets were crammed on and in the drag, and after I had given a “Now, if you please,” such a charming little lass made her appearance from the house, leaning on the arm of a fine, tall, young chap, that you may go some dis-

tance before finding her match. Her shape was of that sort which just suits my palate—plump, compact, and showing good-breeding about the ancles. I can't abide to see a woman gummy about those points. Her face was as bronzed and oval as a young gipsy's, with a pair of eyes that, although a little tinged with weeping, shone like a couple of glowworms' lamps. Curls as black as a crow's wing danced down her cheeks, and her red lips had about the most tempting, tickling invitation to try a game of "kiss and come again" I ever wish to see.

Directly she came out of the porch she was caught in the arms of an old man, whose long, thin, white hair streamed upon his shoulders, and some very vigorous kissing commenced between them, mingled with a few sobs and tears. The old lady then had a similar squeeze; and, after being passed from one to another down a flanked line, the young couple mounted the coach among

“God bless ye!—good luck and a quick return!—Heaven pour its blessings upon you!” and such like good wishes; and off we went with a loud “hurrah!” ringing from the lips of the men, and a great deal of sponging up of tears from the women.

“Parting *may* be sweet sorrur,” observed the newly-saddled head-groom, (or bridegroom, as some folks call ’em) settling himself just behind me, and pressing his wife close to his side, like a hen sheltering a chicken; “but dang me if I loike the taste on it! How dost thee, Clary dear?” continued he, in rather a muddled voice, as if the fumes of deep drinking had clouded his brain.

“I’m—sure—I—can’t—say—Will—Will—William,” replied she, with a sort of stop-short-choke between each word; “but—I—feel—like a Michaelmas flea—all—in—a twitter.”

“Dang all about twittering!” returned he, in a rough but kind-hearted tone. “If ye

have a touch o' the shakes now, I'll lay a crown ye'll warm up by an by."

Then she smiled through her tears like April's sun in a shower, and soon afterwards began to chatter away as if a thought of sadness had never heaved a sigh from her bosom.

"I say, Master Coachman, do you know what we've been about?" inquired he.

"I can guess," I replied.

"Well then, have at 'em! Let's hear your guess," said he.

"Buckled to, as a match pair, I suppose," rejoined I.

"Right, my flower, right to the letter," returned he: "and we're going to Lunnun, for the first time in our lives, to spend the honey month."

"I wish you every joy," said I, "and all the happiness this world can offer ye."

"And a hearty wish it is, my tulip," he replied. "But as we're going to change osses

at the Pig and Whistle here, send me rolling but ye shall drink to us ; ay, in a brimmer too."

I drained my glass to their prosperity, and had some difficulty in getting off from repeating the dose too often. At every stage he offered "drops of comfort;" and had I not urged him to refrain from taking many, he would have been in a very unfit state to take care of either himself or his wife long before we rattled upon the stones of London.

"I say, Clary, we shall feel uncommon lonesome loike in a large strange place by oursels," he whispered, as we just began to get into the bustle of the city. "Supposing we invoie Master Coachman to have a snack with us? He'll tell us how to go about seein the sights, and a great many things we doan't know."

"Do, William, if you please," replied his wife.

"You must tell us where we're to put up

at, Master Coachman," said he ; " for I never thought to inquire afore we started."

" Where we stop is a capital house," returned I : " the Spread Eagle, Gracechurch Street."

" Then there we litter down," he rejoined. " And if you'll take our weddin dinner with us, just say the word, that's all, and doan't be long in coming, for I'm very peckish."

Accepting the frank and well-meant invitation, I hastened to clap on some fresh toggery, and joined them just as the dinner was being brought steaming into the room. It was of the substantial order, consisting of a large weltering peas-pudding, a boiled leg of pork, and a tureen crammed with tripe and onions.

" Ha, ha, Master Coachy !" said he, " ye're in the nick o' time. My grinders were too sharp to wait. Ha, ha, mun ! there's nothing loike hunger for sauce."

We were not long in doing justice to the

solid spread, and at its termination I was told, without any reserve, the particulars of my host's history. After a few glasses of old port, which made his tongue hang as loose as the clapper of a bell, he said: "I and Clary there have known each other for thirteen year and more. We used to trudge it to the same school together when not so high as this table, and, dang it! even then I never was better pleased than a-gathering flowers for her, stealing o' fruit, climbing o' trees for birds' eggs, and such loike coltish frolics. Time gets on apace. We always called each other sweetheart when nothing but chits, and though we didn't talk about marrying, we thought of it no trifling measure, I'll be bound to say. Years went away much in the same fashion. Winter's nights we used to sit afore the log fire uncommon close to one another, roast apples, drink cider, and crack the wood nuts we pulled in the autumn. In spring and hazel time, we roamed in the fields, and

basked in the hay ; and although Clary would pout a little when I kissed her in company, we never had a cross word in our lives."

"Then the course of true love may sometimes run smooth," said I.

"It has with us, Master Coachy," he replied ; "for mothers and fathers had no objections, and meddling gossips didn't interfere with their thorns and brambles. My little store enabled me to take a few acres o' land joining father-in-law's, and, as he's getting old and shaky in his pins, I'm to manage his farm as well as my own, and we're to be partners loike. About a month since, this day was fixed for the weddin ; and so, after a-wandering in the orchard long enough, ye see, I've at last tied myself to a crabtree."—And then such a laugh came from him that was heard in every nook and cranny of the house.

"Well, I'm sure, William !" observed his bride, looking like a rosebud, sweet, young, and beautiful, "you've changed your tune pretty quickly. A crabtree, forsooth !"

"Its fruit is of a nice flavour though," rejoined he, laughing until the tears ran down his round scarlet cheeks; "and I wouldn't change it for any Burgundy pear in the kingdom."

Round he pushed the bottle, and, notwithstanding some very significant hints from Clara, to hold hard, he continued to toss off glass after glass, and give toasts and sentiments, until his eyes began to wax dim, and his boisterous mirth to dwindle into drowsiness.

"Pray, William, drink no more," said his wife, beseechingly.

"Not another drop after one more glass," he replied. But this "one more" was succeeded by many, and until the bottles were empty he continued to add to his ill-timed excess.

The night was waning fast, and the small hours at hand, before I was suffered to depart, although I wished to have left long before.

“I get up betimes, Master Coachy,” said he with a reel, as he rose from his seat to shew me the door, “and shall see ye afore ye start; and now good night.”

Taking a cordial leave of the young couple, I retired to my room to get forty winks before the cock crew. The night was very fine, and, previous to turning in, I threw open the window for the purpose of burning one cigar in the cool refreshing air; for, to tell the truth, there was a heat and singing in my upper attics which told that I had a little more than enough of the ripe grape’s juice. The bright moon was shedding her light upon house-top, dome, and spire, and throwing dark shadows in the abandoned streets. Amatory grimalkins were shrieking in painful discord, rendering wary rats mindful of their whereabouts. The heavy tread of the watchman, and occasionally the jarring voices of the drunken and the dissolute, smote the ear. No other sound could be heard. Sleep had wrapped

the busy world in silence, and aching hearts had ceased to throb, while he sealed the eyelids with oblivion's touch.

Half my havannah had been puffed into a thin blue vapour, curling slowly upwards to mingle with the thinner air; and after watching some fleecy clouds wafted gently by the breeze over the moon's pale face, I determined, when another should pass, to retire to rest. Keeping my resolution, I hastily threw off my garments, and tumbled into bed and a sound sleep in about one and the same minute.

How long I remained an occupier of my own goose feathers, blankets, and sheets, I can't tell; but a voice disturbed me from a deep slumber by saying, "Are you better now, dear?" and something very much like a kiss was pressed, or seemed to be pressed, about the regions of my lips. With a yawn I rubbed my eyes, to be quite sure I was awake. Stretching out my arms, they encountered the warm flesh of a bedfellow, and a faint ray of

morning's early light, just peeping between the drawn curtains, shewed me an indistinct outline of a night-cap trimmed with a large quantity of frills, and a pretty face between them.

"Are you better now, dear Willy?" inquired a gentle voice, and again the sensation of a kiss was repeated.

I was now fairly awake. Quick as the stinging flip on the thin skin of a thoroughbred, I felt the peculiar sensations of my position. Flesh and fish ! there I was, paired off with the bride, without so much as knowing it. Poor Clara ! she little thought of the wrong box she was in ; but—

[Here Jacob's narration was interrupted by John Hogg bursting into a convulsive fit of laughter, and kicking his pail to the farthest end of the room. "Oh ! Mr. Wirkem, sir !" exclaimed he, checking his mirth, "if that's a sammybeast's trick, blow me if twarn't performed awake ! Put me up, and shave me

clean! his daylights might be shuttered, but he could find his way like a blind oss to a hayrick. Ha, ha, ha!—take a suck at the lemon, and at him again!”

Jack’s excitement was cooled by a pass from Mr. Wirkem’s hand, which, for effect, might vie with any professor’s of Mesmerism. Rolling the pail to its former place, he retook his passive posture, and seemed to be “all ears to hear.”]

I was about saying (resumed Jacob, in a firm and decided voice) that she was as far from harm—

Here a half-smothered noise rattled in one-eyed Jack’s throat—

As far from harm (repeated Jacob, slightly turning his head, and bending a serious look upon the unabashed offender) as if her old mother was roosting there. Gathering my ideas into a small bunch, I decided to try and not let the poor little soul know who her bedmate was, and, sticking my head

under the clothes to muffle my voice, I grumbled out that I was "very ill indeed."

"Why did you take so much wine, love?" said she, in a reproachful tone.

"Oh, Lord, my poor head!" I exclaimed, still keeping my face buried.

"Does it ache, Willy?" she asked, tenderly pressing her fingers on my forehead.

"Dreadful loike," returned I, endeavouring to imitate her husband's lingo.

"Let me wet a towel, and bind it round," she rejoined.

"I'll go down in the yard and pump on it," added I, slipping out of bed, and rushing to the door.

"Don't, dear, don't—you'll get your death of cold," was the last observation I heard, as I banged the door on its hinges, and ran along the passage as fast as my legs would carry me, towards the room we had been dining in.

In an easy chair lounged the unconscious

William, with chin resting on his breast, and snoring away most lustily. His feet were in slippers, which shewed that he had been attended by a waiter, and prepared for bed, and the chamber candle had burned to its socket. Shaking him roughly by the collar for a few moments, I got his dull eyes open; but the instant I left off stirring him up, they closed again, and his lips separated for another snore.

“Come, wake up,” hallooed I, pulling him to and fro, like a Mandarin image.

“Ye’ve got the wrong sow by the ear, dang ye!” said he, in a thick guttural voice.

“No, no, I haven’t,” replied I, still keeping him at work; “your wife’s been in bed these three hours.”

These last few words seemed to act like a pail of cold water being thrown in his face. Starting upon his feet, he looked at me, and then round the room, as if his eyes were

going to spring from their sockets. All his hair stood on end, and in a quivering voice he said—

“Be I aloive, or dead as cat’s-meat?”

“Alive, my boy!” returned I; “only you’ve been sleeping here, instead of with your nest-mate, pretty Clara.”

He now appeared to comprehend the position of affairs. A light broke in upon his clouded brain, and with a loud “haw, haw!” he slapped both his thighs, and bawled out lustily, “Dang it! but I’ll be roasted finely for this bout! haw, haw, haw! What’ll my Clary say, I’d loike to know!”

“Follow my advice, and neither she nor anybody else will know of it,” replied I.

“And what’s that, Master Coachy?” returned he.

“Let me assist you off with your toggery here,” said I, “and then go to your room, and mention nothing about having been to sleep; but if any questions are asked as to

how you are, reply, that you're all right now."

"Ah! I see; just let her suppose I've been trying to get myself sober loike afore"—

"Just so," interrupted I. "And you can mention that the pumping on your head did you good."

"Ho, ho, ho!—famous! capital!" he exclaimed: "that'll make her suppose I have been a long time a-dryin it."

"To be sure it will, and account for your length of absence," said I.

In a very short period he was prepared; and, giving a grasp of honest gratefulness for my timely interruption to his profound slumber, he quitted me for the arms of one loving and beloved.

"Well!" observed Mr. Wirkem, rubbing his hands with evident satisfaction, "I'm very glad no harm came of your cuckoo trick, Jacob."

“Where there’s none meant, Dick, there’s seldom much done,” replied Jacob. “How I came to get into such a pickle”—

“And a devil of a *jar* it might have caused,” interrupted the President, looking round with an inward chuckle, for applause to his pun.

—“God only knows!” continued Jacob, without noticing the bestowed cheer. “But, from that day to this, I never heard a whisper of scandal concerning this untoward ramble by moonlight, and which cured me from ever taking another walk in sleep.

When the story was concluded, and the narrator thanked by his companions, Mr. Wirkem desired one-eyed Jack to put a little more water into his glass, and to hand him a lemon.

“Ah, Mr. Wirkem, sir!” exclaimed he, looking at his patron with admiration, as he peeled the acid fruit with a scientific cut, “you’re very fond of your glass.”

“ Yes, Jack,” replied the President ; and, after pausing for the consequent eruption, he added, “ but I’m fonder of *my bottle*.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SLEEP-DRIVER.

“That was a pleasant heat, Jacob,” observed Mr. Wirkem, after a pause; “but as it was rather a short one, perhaps you’ll tackle another before we change osses. How say ye, gentlemen?”

“We shall be very glad to have another draught from the same tap, I’m sure,” replied the Vice-president.

“As that’s the case,” added Jacob, settling himself in his chair, as if it was his old familiar box, “here goes;” and, without further preface, he commenced the following adventure, when under the influence of “the honey-heavy dew of slumber.”

I must make a start by saying that my father—as fine an old male fowl, which low-bred folks call “cock,” as ever drained an ale-tankard or fathomed a punch-bowl—for many years kept the Bells at Colchester, and was the chief proprietor of the *Item*, running between there and London. The delight and sunshine of his heart was this coach, and although a source of but little profit, from the way in which it was horsed, and the tip-top style of all things belonging to the crack turn-out, still nothing on earth took the lead in his affections from this drag and hobbies.

“Keep an eye to your business and accounts, Thomas,” my mother used to say with uplifted finger and shaking head, “and don’t waste your time and substance on such fooleries.”

“Fooleries!” the governor would exclaim: “did ye call it *fooleries* eighteen years ago an more, when I used to rattle the team past

your mother's door at a right merry pace, with their heads and tails up, and you there, all smiles and beauty, to keep kissing your hand till we swept out of sight! Was it *fooleries*, when, of a fine spring-day, I'd pull up at the garden-gate to take a bunch of flowers to stick in my button-hole, and get a smile from ye that seemed to gimble itself through and through my buzzum! Was it *fooleries*, when, on our wedding-day, you sat by my side up to town, and all the oss-keepers along the road hoorayed at ye as though you were Queen of England, eh, Mary! Were those *fooleries*, I ask ye?"

"Well, well, well!" my mother replied, "we were young and foolish then."

"I wish, with all my heart and limbs, we remained so now," rejoined the governor: "those foolish days were uncommon sweet and tender."

"There's dear Jacob—" added my mother: "not one thing do you care to teach him but

how to drive and become versed in all that belongs to coaching. If you were to direct his mind a little more to the Bible and less to the ribands, as you call 'em, he would become"—

"A better methodist parson than the driver of the *Item* by an by," interrupted my father.

It is no matter of surprise that I became almost as fond of, and as great an adept in, the coaching business as my paternal ruler. From infancy I heard of little else, and as soon as I could understand that money was an indispensable for the getting of gingerbread and lollypops, I learned my destined position in life was a seat on the box. At seventeen I left the training in books, and then commenced the regular one in coachmanship. After some three years' "nursing," and it was considered by my admiring father that I was fully capable of steering the *Item* with safety and credit, a day was appointed

for me to climb to the seat, well aired for many years by my progenitor.

It was about a month before the time named for me to usurp the governor's throne on wheels, that we were sitting in the bar-parlour sipping our grog, and having some evening chat, while my mother was stitching, with one eye on her work and the other turned on the customers to see there was no bolter, when Frank Andrews, the horsekeeper, sent a message to say that "he wanted to have a word with my father." Upon the opportunity of so doing being granted by an order for his personal appearance in the parlour, Frank showed himself at the entrance.

"I have come, sir," said he, stroking his hair smoothly down over his forehead, and scraping his feet along the carpet, "to tell ye of something you won't believe."

"That is, you were not drunk last night, I suppose," observed my father.

"You'll say I was, sir; but I worn't, and

haven't been for the last three days," returned Frank — " that is to say," continued he, correcting himself, " not drunk enough to be called incapable of taking care of myself. No, no, no, and never was, to my knowledge. I always, drunk or sober, look out for myself."

" And no bad rule either, Frank," replied his master: " if people generally would keep their weather-eye open for their own welfare, one-third of the world, composed of knaves and quacks, wouldn't be able to fatten like magots on individual folly and imprudence."

At this sage observation my mother dropped her needlework, consisting of an antiquated stocking with a dilapidated heel, and regarded my father with a mingled look of wonder and admiration.

" Why, Thomas!" exclaimed she, " where did you get that? I never heard such a wise saying from your lips before."

" That's because ye have n't listened to

them," returned her husband with a pompous raising of his fat, well-lined double-chin. "Many as wise a-one's been picked from the same poke," continued he, touching his bald pate significantly.

"It's a pity then they've been thrown away upon me," rejoined my mother, with a merry laugh ringing from her lips.

"Mary," added the governor, seriously and majestically, although a sparkle of merriment flashed in his eye; "it *is* a pity; I've often thought so."

In an instant the laugh was checked: my mother resumed the darning of the stocking.

"And what have you got to say, Frank?" inquired my father, slyly pointing with his thumb to my mother, and giving me the shade of a triumphant wink.

"Simply this, sir," replied the horsekeeper; "I'm in a funk—I *may* say a d—d funk."

"There's many a one in the same pot," replied his master, "only they have n't pluck

enough to own it. Many an action that's called a brave one's done more through fear than courage. As for a sample : when two folks go out to fight a duel, one or both are in *fear* of what'll be said of their honour, as it's called, but where this part of the body is particularly stationed seems doubtful. I have heard some men complain of their honour being wounded when the breech has been kicked ; others, when a whip has been brought to bear between the shoulders ; and some by having a little fly-brusher held over them. It is no uncommon thing for a man to find his honour injured by having the ends of his toes trodden on, or his nose pulled. But it signifies little how the wound is occasioned : in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of every thousand *fear* is linked, and closely linked, with the means of redress, and is always coupled with the carrying of 'em out. Not a man living but would wish himself in any other person's boots when a loaded pistol

was levelled at his heart. But come, Frank, what are you in a stew about—a licking from your wife?”

“ It does n’t lay in the old ooman’s overalls to come that dodge with *me*,” returned Frank ; “ quite t’other, I assure ye.”

“ Well ! then what’s the matter ? ” inquired the governor.

“ You’ll chalk me down on your slate as a reg’lar-built nincompoop when I tell ye, sir, that our yard’s troubled with a fay, a ghost, or somethin not flesh and blood,” said Frank : “ but it’s as true as what the parson reads o’ Sundays,” continued he.

“ I shall not call you any sort of poop,” replied my father, “ but arrive at the truth at once by saying the chinks on the slate in the taproom raised the fay in your smoked and foggy brain.”

“ I supposed as much,” rejoined the horse-keeper ; “ in course I did. But what’s the odds ! words don’t gainsay facts. The stable’s

haunted, and I can prove it, if eyes is evidence."

My mother was of the superstitious order, believing in spirits rambling—

"Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And, for the day, confin'd to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes, done in their days of nature,
Are burnt and purg'd away."

"Let us hear," said she, with curiosity depicted strongly in her features, "what you have seen, Frank."

"Ma'am, I will," returned Frank, with a face that would have done credit to a mute at the funeral of an emperor. "The night afore last I'd had my whack after doing up the tits, and was just being tucked up by my old ooman, who is always afeard I should roll out o' bed, as I did once afore and sprained my wrist,—when I thought I heard sombody a-creeping about the harness-room. 'Ho, ho!' said I, softly, 'there's priggin o' curbs and bits going on, I suppose; give me the poker,

old dear ; I'll make one among 'em.' Taking a damper in the palm of my hand, I laid hold o' the sprig of iron, and crept down the ladder as if I was a-walking on the points of pins barefooted. I was about the middle of the ladder, when, by the light o' the moon, which showed every thing almost as plain as the sun at mid-day, I saw a tall white thing a-striding up the stable, very like a ooman in her shroud. Uncommon queer I felt all of a sudden. A sweat broke out on me, as though I was about going off in a fluid, like a snowball afore a roasting fire, and not a hair on my scone would keep its place, but stared like a oss's in a winter's wind. My chin began to wag, and, Lor, how the grinders chattered ! I could hear 'em for all the same as a bag of marbles being shook together.

“ To the farthest end of the stable the what-you-may-call-em went, and then, turning round, walked back again towards me. I tried to call out, but my tongue stuck to the

roof of my mouth as though it was tarred, and not a holloa could I raise. As the thing-em-bob came nearer and nearer, I endeavoured to back up the ladder: however, not a leg would move, and there I sat fixed and staring, like a man in the stocks. Foot by foot the what's-o-name came up, and when within a short distance of me I shut my daylight, so afeard was I to look any longer at it; and then," said Frank, with a cold shiver shaking him through every nerve, "I knew the whatever-it-might-be had crept and stood quite still close to me. A hot steaming breath, which smelt uncommon like backy, but which I suppose was brimstone, was blown into my face, and seemed to take all my senses away, for, until my old ooman's voice hailed me, I didn't know where I was, or what I was a-doin of. I opened my peepers and looked all round as far as I could see, but the thingum-ma-jig had gone, how or where the devil knows—I don't.

“ Gaining a little pluck, I ventured up to bed again, and settled the old ooman’s tongue, which wagged like a bell’s clapper about my queer looks, by threatening to stick her head in a stable-pail if she didn’t come to a short stop ; and knowing, from a few events in her life, that I meant what I said, she clapped the skid on it about as quick as any ooman I ever met with, and I dropped off to sleep.”

“ And pray,” said my father, “ what sort of a supper had ye been eating and drinking ? ”

“ As good a one as any Christian stomach could wish for,” replied Frank : “ a pound o’ rump-steaks, some mashed taters, a snack o’ bread-and-cheese, some cowcumber and ing-ins, a quart of half-an-half, and three glasses of gin-an-water.”

“ No wonder you saw a ghost then,” replied his master, laughing. “ Why, man ! an ostrich could hardly digest such a meal just before going to perch, and in all probability would

have a distempered brain if he was to try. Ghost indeed ! faugh !”

“ Stop a bit, sir,” added the horsekeeper, with the air of one having a ready rejoinder : “ I might have doubted like you, and thought myself mistaken somehow or other ; but last night I sat up on purpose to watch, before telling you any thing about it, to see if the thing would come again ; and sure enough about the same time I saw it glide like a shadow, for it didn’t seem to walk, right into the stable from the harness-room, and, after taking a turn or two there, vanish away.”

“ I believe it was a spirit,” said my mother. “ Often have I read and been told of such circumstances occurring, and I don’t see any cause to discredit this.”

“ Pooh ! pooh !” exclaimed the governor ; “ spirits forsooth ! the only spirits that trouble mortals are those poured down their throats.”

This sceptical opinion, however, had little

effect on Frank or my mother, the one maintaining that he had seen one, and the other expressing a firm faith in the statement.

“We ought to go for a parson, sir,” said the horsekeeper, “and get him to rub this poor devil of a ghost down, and settle it with a mash of religious tracts, or a sermon-ball or two, enstead of argufying about the matter.”

“Get away, man,” replied his master, testily: “parson, indeed! go to the bar, and tell them to give you a quart of good old ale, with a platter of toasted cheese; put it under your vest, go to bed, and don’t talk any more nonsense to me about ghosts.”

The order for this material poultice of consolation appeared at once to allay the anxiety and fear of the horsekeeper, and he retired with pleasing anticipations of the treat.

Tales of horror and of marvel travel at a railroad pace. From mouth to mouth they’re carried, and ready ears yawn to drink them

in like thirsty plants soaking up the summer shower. There seems to be no surfeiting this taste, and the farther the stories wander the more they increase, and become exaggerated from truth and fair proportion. An innate desire to cause detestation, dread, or astonishment, is natural to the constitution of man, and, with few exceptions, the feeling is universal to a greater or less degree. In a few days the report of the Bells being haunted flew in every direction. Nothing was talked of or thought of in the neighbourhood but the wanderer of the stilly night, and crowds visited the spot where it was stated that he paced up and down to frighten us "fools of nature;" all which much amused my father, and added no little to the profits of the tap.

The varied statements of the form in which he came were as numerous as gnats dancing in clouds. Some said it was a picked and fleshless skeleton wrapped in a winding-sheet; others, that it was a gigantic monster with

eyes of fire, and breathing forth blue flames highly flavoured with brimstone. One party insisted the spirit was that of a commercial traveller, who committed suicide in the stable half a century ago, by tickling a vicious horse with a straw in order that his brains might be kicked out.

The different versions of the tale, thrice ten times told, and repeated over and over, however, at last ceased to interest, and the excitement dwindled away as though the cause for it had never been. Occasionally the horsekeeper would refer to the supernatural visitation; but even he could scarcely get a willing listener a fortnight after the occurrence had taken place.

It was within three days of the fixed period for my taking the ribands of the *Item* from the fist of my paternal, and we had been discussing the subject till late at night over a bowl of capital punch, with two or three companions of the governor, when my

mother, weary and impatient of the never-ending topic, gave strong hints for the party to take down their hats and walk. Obeying the telegraphic innuendoes, we separated, and wended our respective paths to perch.

About an hour after midnight, according to my mother's story, related subsequently, she was disturbed from her sleep by the angry growl of the yard-dog, chained to an old headless beer-barrel. Rising from her warm nest, she cautiously drew the blind from the window, to ascertain the reason of Wasp's interference.

It was a brilliant night. A thick mist hung in folds upon the ground, through which the pale moonbeam streamed, rendering those things visible that otherwise would have been concealed. The croak of the toad broke on the ear as he crawled his loathsome body slowly along, and the strangely-formed bat was whirling from earth to roof, and from roof stooping to the ground again. The

chirping cricket called amorously to his mate, and his thin harsh note was heard far away from the bush in which he was secreted. Sombre beetles loaded the air with their drumming wings, and velvet-speckled moths hied to sip dew from the loaded flowers. Things that love the night were revelling; those of the day were at rest.

As my mother continued to gaze upon a scene which must gratify the least sensitive mind, although perhaps depressing to the spirits, her superstitious fears as to the stories she had lately heard returned in all their strength. With a presentiment of an approaching cause of terror, she peered through the thick vapour, and conjured, in her heated imagination, innumerable fantastic shapes from the most common-place forms. The water-butt, with its leaden pipe from the stable-roof, was taken for a dingy imp standing on his head. The white-painted pump caused the anxious watcher's heart to knock

loudly against her breast, and it was some minutes before her fixed look could decipher the reality of the twisted and distorted sucker of water. Long shadows, cast from moonlit chimney-pots, assumed all manner of dread spectres' shades, and the weathercock with its outstretched limbs seemed to dance like the skeleton of some huge raven. Still, after a long examination of these respective sources of fear, they one by one vanished from the oppressed brain, and, every surrounding object being exhausted, my mother was about retiring once more to bed, when Wasp flew out of her tub, and with a wild savage bark tried to seize something in view, but which her short chain prevented.

Indistinct, but still visible, a form glided towards the dog, and stopped not until close to her jaws. Crouching to the ground, as though humbly craving pardon for a fault committed, Wasp turned round and sneaked into her kennel again. Tall and white from

head to foot the form stood for an instant before the kennel, and then, like a shadowy unsubstantial being of another world, gradually faded away in the cloudy mist.

Terror-stricken and silent, my mother remained for some minutes, gazing with starting eyes towards the spot where the spectre became lost to sight, expecting momentarily a re-appearance.

“Why don’t you come to bed, Mary?” asked the governor, disturbed by his mate’s vacating her wonted place.

“Hush!” exclaimed she; “hush! I see it now.”

“See what, my dear?” inquired my father, between a snore and a grumble.

“Come here; hasten;” she rejoined, intensely excited.

With a slow and discontented movement my father stretched his feet upon the floor, and rubbing his eyes to brighten them from the dull effects of deep slumber, he looked

towards the point indicated by my mother's finger.

"Ha! humph!" exclaimed the governor, yawning: "Well, what am I to look at, eh?"

"Don't you see any thing?" inquired my mother.

"A great many things, my dear," replied he, "and among others a foolish old woman close to me!"

"But look! see! it moves now! can't you see the door open?"

The governor made no reply for a few seconds, but drawing a long breath, and rubbing the breath-stained pane with his elbow, looked with extraordinary change of expression at the spot to which his wife's absorbed attention was drawn. He at length was about ejaculating some hasty words of surprise, when my mother caught him by the arm, and pressed a hand over his lips: "Hush!" she said, "for Heaven's sake, say not a word! Who knows what may happen?"

“Happen!” he muttered: “powers of light and darkness, what’s all this about, I should like to know?”

The proceedings taking place in the yard below were sufficient to cause profound astonishment in the minds of any persons, in a far less degree interested in the result than my father and mother. Clattering on the stones, the faint outline of a horse, white as the curling mist surrounding it, was seen issuing from the stable-door, harnessed complete from blinker to crupper, and the polished buckles and trappings glittering in the pale rays of the moon.

“That’s Alice Gray,” whispered my father.

Immediately in her wake was another horse of rather a darker shade.

“There’s the little sorrel,” said the governor, between his teeth, and his eyes as big as teacups with astonishment. “And here comes the pair of iron greys,” continued he, as the figures of two horses following the others

emerged from the stable-door. The wonder increased. Scarcely believing the correctness of his vision, he saw this favourite team proceed to a shed close by, under which stood the *Item* all ready for the next day's journey, and a tall, white, spectre-looking object, flitting about them here and there, like a moth about a candle. In less time than it takes to boil an egg, lightly the horses sprang forward, a whip cracked in the air, and out bowled the *Item* from the shed.

“Bless my stars and garters!” exclaimed my father, as the coach rattled past the window into the street; “if that ghost hasn’t boned the *Item*. Here Jacob, Thomas, John, Charles, Frank; Frank Andrews, I say,” halloed he, throwing open the casement; “Frank, by G—d they’ve boned the *Item*! Where are ye all? Help, help, help!”

“Here am I, sir,” replied a voice, which was recognised as that of the horsekeeper’s. “What do you think of the fay now, sir, eh!”

I've been a watching all its goings on—the Lord purtect us!”

“Saddle the cob instantly,” bawled the governor: “a fay or the devil, I'll be at his heels.”

“Stop, Thomas, in the name of Heaven!” cried my mother, catching hold of her husband's night-gear, as he rushed to the door with his drawers in his hand, and merely a pair of slippers on his feet: “stop, Thomas, in the name of Heaven!” she gasped, fixing a firmer clutch on the tail of his shirt: “you'll be turned into a pillar of salt like Lot's wife, or something worse, if you dare to follow. The ways of Heaven are inscrutable; attempt not to interfere.”

“Let me go, Mary,” rejoined the governor, struggling to free himself from the grasp. “What! lose the *Item*! Let me go, I say!” and with a sudden jerk he gained his liberty, leaving the piece of his garment in the hands of his anxious wife.

With a bound and a jump he cleared the stairs, threw back bolts and locks, rushed into the yard, and, finding the cob had as yet but a bridle on, he dragged him out of the stable, and mounted, barebacked, to pursue the phantom-coachman.

“God speed ye!” exclaimed Andrews, frightened beyond description for his master’s safety.

“Call Jacob to follow me,” said the governor, striking his unrowelled and stripped heels into his horse’s sides, and starting off at a brisk gallop.

I have often heard my mother say that the figure my father cut as he clattered out of the yard was more ludicrous than she ever saw or heard of. A long white cotton night-cap, pulled down over his ears, a tail-less shirt, and a pair of short drawers, made up the whole of his attire. But no steel-clad knight of old felt himself more careless of danger when tilting for his “ladye-love” than did

the governor in pursuit of his favourite drag, the *Item*. On he went, urging his sturdy little steed to his utmost speed, as he heard the wheels of the coach in the silent night become more distinct. Nearer and nearer he approached, and the less the distance became the more desirous was he to reach the object. At length, about a mile and a quarter from the town, he caught a glimpse of the machine and the spectre-whip, in the clear moon's light, as they were just descending a hill.

“I wonder whether he'll stop to put the skid on,” said the governor.

The proceeding in question, however, was apparently to be adopted, for scarcely had he engendered the solicitous thought when the coach came to a stand-still.

“That's right, my buck!” ejaculated my father: “now I'll nab ye when you stop at the bottom.”

The *Item* had reached the level ground, and

again was pulled up just as the governor rattled the cob to the hind-wheels.

“Now then, who the devil are ye, and what business have ye with my coach and hosses?” asked he as well as he could, for his breath was somewhat spent.

Not a word was spoken in reply. Slowly and carefully the bleached dragsman descended from his seat, went to the wheel and unfixed the skid, and then, gathering up the ribands, was about climbing into the box again, when the governor burst forth with

“Not if ye’re Beelzebub himself! Come on,” said he, sliding from the cob’s back, and throwing himself into fighting trim: “you shall either polish me off, or I will you.”

Still no notice was taken of the challenge. The possessor of the reins appeared not to be aware even of the governor’s presence, or at least not to care for it, but continued to mount the seat he had pre-occupied.

“Now this is a *leetle* too much,” said my father; and seizing the ghostly coachman round the middle, he hurled him from the wheel, with the strength of a second Sampson, into a large thick bed of thistles on the roadside.

A howl of pain and terror soon revealed the mystery. There *I* lay, bruised and pricked, the unwitting actor of the scene, and author of the farce of “THE SLEEP-DRIVER.”

“Well, that was as queer a drive as ever I heard of, Jacob,” observed Mr. Wirkem, as the narrator concluded his adventure. “But how did you get the traps on?”

“Heaven only knows,” replied Jacob: “but as I have told you, so did the events occur.”

“We haven’t kept our time to-night, gentlemen,” said the President, pulling out his watch: “it’s more than ten minutes past midnight. However, good company makes

the hours run away like thoro'-breds; we can't always keep 'em in hand."

With this remark, Mr. Wirkem rose from his chair, and the meeting separated.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RESURRECTIONIST.

The New Year! how happy and joyous the sound falls! The past, replete with care and sadness, has sunk in Time's abyss, and Hope, budding from the o'ercharged breast, springs like a flower in the early summer's sun. Sorrows carved deeply in many a heart are then forgotten, and the gaudy future is anticipated, alas! only to deceive. "The New Year's come!" is the exclamation. Hearts beat lightly, hands are clasped, and a "God bless ye, may it prove a happy one!" is friendship's blessing, fervent and sincere. The old forget the companions of their youth, over whom the rank weed rears its rough and taste-

less blade, and they give no heed of the warning to themselves. The young are even glad that one more year is added to the score, so eager is tender childhood to clutch the shadowy power of sinking age. All, all can look upon the days that are gone, and still feel no sorrow nigh. "The New Year's come," is the burthen of the song and jest, and 'tis

as the swan

Singing her own requiem.

The club-room presented more than an ordinary appearance for the evening's festivities. Two extra candles were stuck in the necks of a couple of wine-bottles on the high mantel-shelf, and four more than usual were placed on the table. A large misletoe was suspended in the centre of the smoked and cobwebbed ceiling, and sprigs of holly, speckled with red berries, were adorning sundry crevices in the cracked panels of the walls. In his wonted place sat Mr. Wirkem, somewhat indistinct

from the volumes of smoke curling around him, and his companions filled their respective seats according to their custom or inclination.

“ Well, gentlemen !” said the President, stretching out his legs and leaning well back in his chair, “ here we are together for the first time on a New Year’s day. Suppose we have a bumper and sentiment to the occasion.”

“ Good, very good !” responded Tom Short.

“ Capital !” ejaculated one-eyed Jack, taking his glass from the floor, which was the selected spot for its standing, and commencing the mixture of strong liquors. “ Come, Joey,” continued he, “ shall I give you a snorter, or will ye make one for yourself ?”

“ Each man for himself, and God for us all !” replied Mr. Wyper, in his hollow sepulchral tone.

“ There’s an old cock-crow for ye, sir !” added Jack, laughing, and addressing his

patron: "there never was a he raven to beat him at a croak."

"Raise your glasses above your heads that I may see you're all fairly filled," said Mr. Wirkem, giving John Hogg a preliminary nod as a signal for that individual's silence. Perceiving his mandate had been obeyed, the President held aloft his brimming goblet, and said, "May the New Year bring new friends, and the old ones last for ever!"

Tumultuous applause followed this sentiment. John Hogg's enthusiasm appeared to have no limits. For some time he continued to "hooray," and kick his pail until the iron hoops threatened to sever from their stronghold. At length, however, he resumed his seat, and concluded his burst of approval by remarking that "a bishop wouldn't preach so much religion in a month of sermons."

"The call's with me, Dick, I believe?" said Jacob Plywel.

“Yes, Jacob,” replied the President, “according to the rules.”

“Come then, Tom Short, we’ll have a touch of your quality in the singing line,” replied Jacob.

“You might have picked a better card from the pack,” remarked the party addressed.

“I don’t know that,” added Mr. Wirkem, with decided symptoms of an internal eruption, “for I’m sure we’ve got a *trump*.”

A loud laugh ensued from this sally of the President, and when the last “ha, ha!” had ceased, Tom Short began the following song in a pleasing musical tone:—

The leaf is red, the leaf is sere,
The sunbeams early die;
The swallow leaves her dwelling here
To seek a warmer sky.

Then mount, away to the forest glen,
I hear its echoes ring;
When winter falls on other men,
It is the Sportsman’s spring.

The leaf is red, the leaf is sere,
Then brim the bowl with wine;
What care we for the closing year,
Of early eve's decline!

For gay the vigil hunters keep,
Nor heed the daylight gone,
The grape's red drops alone shall weep
For joys that bless the morn.

Oh then we'll ride by the covert side,
When the gallant fox steals by,
And give at view the loud halloo,
And hear the opening cry.

The trophies dear of that career
With blithesome spirits bring:
No fading scenes of life are here,
It is the Sportsman's spring!

Spoons chinked and glasses hopped upon the board like parched peas upon a drum-head, as the vocalist completed his imposed task. After a lapse of some duration, Mr. Wirkem gave a knock with the knuckle of his dexter thumb, and all was hushed as if a fairy's wand had rendered impotent the sturdy, thumping fists.

“As atoms are to bodies, so are seconds to the hours,” sagely observed the President. “Now, Tom, clap the collar on the right oss; the ticket’s with you,” continued he.

“I was thinking, Dick Wirkem,” replied Tom, “that most of us here have seen a great deal of life, but a very little of death; and, as novelty’s a tempting bait, I’ve made up my mind to clap the harness on Mr. Wyper for a little go of the latter, if so be that gentleman approves.”

John Hogg surveyed his friend from heel to head, and then slowly retraced his gaze from head to heel. Having performed this minute examination, he clenched his fist, and deliberately rising from his seat held it within the smallest possible space from Melancholy Joey’s red-tipped nose. “You may think I’m a jokin,” said he, with a savage expression scarcely admissible of such a supposition, “but I’m not, so help me Betsy Baker! If you don’t give mouth to somethin like a top-

sawyer of a yarn, I'll give ye a wallop in that'll last in your bones for ever and one day longer."

"Gently, John, gently, my lad," returned Mr. Wirkem: "we must have no walloping here, and no threats to wallop."

"Well, Mr. Wirkem, sir," returned Jack, corrected and subdued, "I hope, after such a dignity as Melancholy Joey's got thrust upon him, he won't go for to make a ass of himself."

"No, no, no," added the President: "Mr. Wyper will endeavour to avoid that, I'm sure."

"I tell ye what it is, sirs," commenced Joey; "I've seen many a rum dodge in my time, and if one of 'em will suit as I saw it, why I can come the thing gingerly."

"Well said, old buck!" exclaimed John Hogg; "there's nothin like a little conceit at a go off."

"Confidence for the whip, and steadiness

for the ribands !” added the President. “ But come, Mr. Wyper, sharpen up with a sip of your grog, and lead away.”

Melancholy Joey’s ideas of a sip appeared to be of an enlarged order, for, taking his full glass, he drained it to the last drop, and, after wiping his moistened lips upon the cuff of his “ seedy” coat, he was prepared for the telling of his tale.

I’m what may be called a reg’lar built *grave* subject, and have been all my life (said he). As I told ye once afore, I was bred and born in a black yard, was brought up in one, and expected—(here Melancholy Joey sighed like a quaker)—to be tucked up and ticketed for a better world in the same spot. Some folks by nater are chalked out for partickler callings ; I was for the funeral trade. When quite a little lad, sirs, I used to trudge it long distances to see a fine burial. The tolling of a bell was music to me, and the shovelling of the gravel into the grave good diversion.

Sometimes I'd have a game of hocky on the sly with an old toothless skull, thrown up by the sexton's spade, and my playground was always in the churchyard alone.

It ain't generally known that we get up in the undertaking business as people do in t'other purfessions. From acting mute at the doorpost, we go to carrying a board o' feathers, and so from step to step we rise, until we drive either the cold-meat wan or the chief mopers, which are the highest steps in our ladder. After the various moves had been made—and I rose uncommon rapid (continued Joey, with a sparkle of pride glittering in his dull, fishy eyes) — the governor informed me I was to have the wan at the next job, as I deserved encouragement from the ansum manner I performed my parts. Sirs, I was struck all of a heap with pleasure. Not quite five-an-twenty, and to have the wan! it was more than I expected for ten years to come.

Soon after this, my master said, "We've got a country job, Joey."

"Have we, sir?" said I, almost a-bustin with delight.

"Yes," replied he; "a stout gentleman from Paddington will be your inside passenger to Canterbury, where his friends will meet him the day after to-morrow."

"Yes, sir," returned I.

"He's a wery fat un," continued he, "and therefore you'll start to-night, so as to take him down comfortable and gently by easy stages."

"To be sure, sir," said I.

"Don't jolt him, Joey," added he; "he might turn out an unpleasant customer if you did; he's such a *melting* subject."

"I won't, sir, you may rely upon it," responded I.

"You'll put up at the White Hart, where we shall meet you with the traps," continued

master : “ and, now you’ve got your orders, mind and obey ’em.”

“ I will, sir, to the alphabet,” said I, tickled to death with the notion of the thing.

It was just nine o’clock on a cold night in February that I started with my passenger from Paddington Green. My pair of tits had their tails screwed up with straw to keep ’em from whisking the mud about, which laid in the road inches deep; and of course the wan wasn’t toggled out with feathers, as it was only for travelling.

Howsumever, notwithstanding a want of show, I felt proud enough as I drove away with my load. Sometimes the moon peeped for a moment between dark and heavy clouds flying before a whistlin wind, making the night look pitchy black and comfortless; but lighting my short pipe, and between the puffs humming a tune, I felt as cheerful as a cricket in a hayfield.

I was nursing the nags slowly up a hill, about ten mile from Town, when I saw a very

snug little box of an inn on the road side. "Just the place for me to refresh at," said I to myself; and, after seeing the nags provided for in the stable, I took my way to the tap, for the purpose of getting a 'snack and damper.

"What, Joey!" hallooed a voice as I entered the room; "is that you, old feller?"

"Yes," replied I, "it is; how are you, Harry Drinkal?"

"Pretty middlin, thank ye," rejoined he, "but a little flat upon my luck."

It was one of our cast-off dragsmen, who had been in almost every yard in London; but nothing could keep him sober even at his jobs, and so at last he was bundled off altogether, and had, as I was told some time before, turned Resurrectionist. Harry was a short and thick-set wiry looking fellow, with a broad face, and a pair of small eyes sunk right under his shaggy brows. His mouth was the largest I ever saw, and, taking him all in all,

he was about the ugliest chap to be seen in a month's march. By his side sat a fox-haired Irishman, tall, bony, and with the sinews of an ox shewn in his bared and brawny arms ; between his legs a white bulldog squatted ; and, taking the three as a party, I never met with a rougher lot.

“ This old pal o' mine,” said Harry, “ Mr. O'Brien, is a man always ready to fight and drink from sunrise to sunset.”

“ Backards and forards as long as you plase,” observed Mr. O'Brien.

“ I prefer drinking to fighting,” I replied ; “ and, if you'll drink my health, I'll stand treat.”

After two or three goes of gin and whiskey each, they became very talkative, and commenced letting me into their secrets.

“ I suppose you know what we're about to-night ?” whispered Harry.

“ I guess the trick you're up to,” said I.

“ Sacking a subject,” replied he ; “ and the

best stroke of trade that we've had since we took to the spade and pickaxe."

"And how's that?" I inquired.

"A young feller who is a-walkin' Guy's saw-bone and amputation shop wants a subject for private use," replied Harry, "and, just for once in his life, wishes to see us peel one of its shroud. But people must pay for peepin, you know; and so, said I, 'we don't have no company on them occasions, sir. My partner wouldn't take a matter of five pound to let you be with us.'

"Perhaps he'll take ten," said he.

"A flimsy so scored," replied I, "might get over his prejudices; but he's uncommon delicate." With this he forked over the tin, and Mr. O'Brien's consent was obtained for his joining us to-night at the diggin match."

"It's a rum notion," observed I.

"Curiosity, sir, curiosity as pure as whiskey," said Mr. O'Brien. "There's more dibs made out o' curiosity than any other universal

feelin. From a penny peep-show down to seeing a queen crowned, or a man gibbeted, it's curiosity that brings the browns."

"He's a real out-an-out feel-osopher," remarked Harry. "The firm of Drinkal and O'Brien's no soft-soap sammy concern," continued he laughing, and giving his partner a heavy bang between his shoulders.

"Are you sure of a good find to-night?" inquired I.

"Certain," replied Harry. "We had information of a young female's being earthed to-day not three mile from here, and the yard's nicely lonesome."

"I thought you said our customer was to join us here at ten o'clock," remarked Mr. O'Brien, as the clock in the tap-room struck the hour, and a wooden something-like-a-bird cuckooed before the dial.

"Well, old punctual, and so I did," replied Harry. "I dare say the gentleman will be here presently."

“ I’ll go and get the horse put in then,” rejoined his partner; and with this he left the room.

Soon after his going away the door was thrown open, and in came a tall young man wrapped in a great wide cloak. He seemed somewhere about twenty year old, and was very pale about the mug, with sharp thin features.

“ Pretty near your time, sir,” observed Harry, rising as the stranger entered the room.

“ Yes,” replied he: “ but I’m hardly disposed to accompany you, the night’s so wretched and cold.”

“ Never turn tail, sir,” said Harry, encouragingly. “ Take a glass o’ hot brandy-an’-water; that’s a lotion agin cold.”

“ Are you ready to start?” asked the gentleman.

“ We shall be in a brace of minutes,” replied Harry. “ My partner’s gone to bring the cart round.”

Mr. O'Brien, however, remained absent much longer than was expected, and when he returned he seemed to be quite warm. The perspiration stood on his face, and he was panting for breath.

"What the devil have you been about?" asked Harry.

"I forgot to bring the spades," replied he; "and I've been a matter of two mile to get a couple of tools."

"Forgot to bring the spades!" exclaimed Harry. "Why I —"

"No you didn't," interrupted Mr. O'Brien.

"But I say —"

"You didn't," again interrupted the Irishman, and I fancied he gave Harry a leary wink.

"Eh! oh! ha! perhaps you're right, perhaps you're right," returned Harry, and then he went into a fit o' laughin, as though he'd crack his sides. "Only to think," said he, „ that I should forgot them spades. What a

go!" and then he haw-haw'd again, as if he was full o' grins.

I couldn't see any thing to laugh at in this, and wondered what tittivated him so. Oh, sirs! I was young, and greener than grass then. Little did I think o' the prank Mr. O'Brien had played with my fat passenger.

"Do you take the wan any farther to-night?" said Harry to me.

"Yes," replied I, "about six or eight miles."

"Then you'll pass the spot where we're going to work," replied he: "perhaps you'll hail us; and we'll give ye a drop o' comfort from this flask," continued he, producing one from his pocket. "It's full to the cork of good old Jamaica rum."

"Thank'e," returned I, "I will, if there's no chance of being nabbed."

"Lor love ye!" said Mr. O'Brien, "there's not a sowl to interrupt us; and if there was," continued he between his clenched teeth, and

looking more savage than the bull-dog at his feet, "I'd soon quiet 'em."

"Come, I hear the cart's round," observed Harry, "let's be off; we shall see you again presently."

With this the three left the house, and, climbing into a light cart at the door, Harry hallooed out, "Let go his head," and with a plunge the horse bounded for'ard at a break-neck pace.

I was soon afterwards on the same road with my drag. The cold increased with the night. A thin sleet fell, with some rain, and was blown into my face till I had no feelin left in it. Howling and whistling through the leafless trees and hedges, the wind swept along, and nothing was heard above its roar but the bark of a watch-dog now and then, and the harsh scream of a screech-owl, as she flapped her broad wing in the wintry blast.

At a jog trot I proceeded, and when I had

got about three miles from the inn, I saw in the rays of the moon, which showed her face for a moment, the spire of a country church peeping above the top of a tall dark yew-tree, and close to the road side. Under the tree I saw a light move, and then it appeared to be put out. "That's Harry's dark lantern," said I to myself, and so it proved to be.

Upon stopping opposite the church, I heard the click of the spade at work, and, getting off my box, was directed towards the spot by the sound. When within a short distance of them, the dog, who was squatting on a sunken grave, gave a deep threatening growl.

"Is that you, Joey?" inquired Mr. O'Brien.

"All right!" I replied.

"Down, Jowler, then, down, old feller," replied his master. "If it had been any body we didn't want to see," continued O'Brien, laughing, "he'd have drawn their windpipe out by this time."

By the side of a partly-opened grave, in which Harry was working, stood the young medical student, and, as I came near him, I knew he was either trembling with fear, or shivering with cold, for his teeth chattered together, so as to be heard some distance off. "Make haste," he said, impatiently; "I wish to God I had not come!"

"Don't get in the fidgets, sir," replied O'Brien; "Harry will soon unkennel her. Take a drop o' rum: it'll comfort the cockles of your buzzum, sir," continued he, offering the flask.

"No, no, no, I can't drink," rejoined he. "Make haste; pray let us leave here directly."

"As soon as possible, if you're in such a hurry," added O'Brien. "But in a snug cozy place like this, I don't see any call for haste."

"I do, I do," returned the gentleman, quickly. "I *know* there's cause for haste."

"Pooh, pooh! you're a little bit scared,

sir, that's all," added the Irishman. "Ha, ha, ha! how easy some folks are frightened! Ha, ha, ha! I can't help laughing:" and his loud peal echoed through the place, until every gravestone seemed to throw back the sound.

"I say, you Paddy," called a voice from below.

"Well, and what have you to say?" inquired O'Brien, leaning over the edge of the grave.

"We're in the wrong box," replied Harry.

"This is a real stale un, and no mistake."

The Irishman, hearing this, stamped his feet with rage, and cursed like a fiend.

"Hush!" exclaimed the young gentleman, springing to his side: "hold your ribald tongue."

"Ain't it enough to make a dumb infant swear?" returned O'Brien. "Are ye sure it's too ripe, Harry?" inquired he.

"I'm not certain," replied his partner; "but the box is very crumbly."

After a short pause O'Brien lowered some grappling irons attached to a rope into the grave, and told Harry to fix them in the shroud; "for," said he, "you'll be a week in making up your mind about her."

"I'm very doubtful, certainly," replied Harry; "but there you are, all right; pull away."

Hand over fist the Irishman tugged the corpse to the verge of the grave, and, taking it in his arms, threw it across his bent knee upon the ground.

"She won't do," said he, putting his hand into a side pocket, and taking out a hammer. "But she's got some good grinders for the dentist;" and, holding the lantern close to the body's face, he struck the mouth sharply, crushing in the jaw.

A shriek wild and piercing burst close to my ear as the hammer fell. "My God! My God!" exclaimed a voice; and, jumping yards at a single bound, the young gentleman fas-



THE STRANGER RECOGNISING HIS MOTHER.

tened a grip like a tiger upon the throat of the Irishman. In a moment he was hurled to the ground, like a bull-dog shaking a rat from him.

“Why, what’s the matter with you?” said O’Brien.

“The matter!” screamed the medical student. “The matter!” and then he rolled upon the earth, as though in liquid fire. “Ha, ha, ha!” but the laugh was more horrid than his shrieks.

“By St. Patrick!” said O’Brien, “he’s gone clean mad.”

“Would to Heaven that I was!” hallooed the gentleman. “Would to Heaven that I was! for then”.....

He could say no more, but fell into a fit by the side of the corpse, apparently with as little of life left in him.

Thinking his noise might disturb the neighbourhood, I didn’t wait an instant longer, but, running as fast as I could out of the yard,

mounted my trap, and started again with my load. "But, sirs," said Melancholy Joey, casting a look respectively to each individual present, and, making a brief, but effective pause, "I learned soon afterwards that the subject was the young gentleman's *own mother*."

This startling announcement caused a thrill of horror. Melancholy Joey was regarded with silent looks for some time, as if to examine whether he had been too poetic with his prose. At length Mr. Wirkem asked, "Is that tale *quite* true, Mr. Wyper?"

"Upon my Davy!" replied Joey; "but I haven't quite finished it."

CHAPTER X.

THE RESURRECTIONIST CONCLUDED.

The next morning (resumed Melancholy Joey), and just as we were figged out in our best plumes and feathers, a pal that was agoin to mount the board said, "Joey, this here piece o' writin's for you," offering me a letter directed "to Mr. Jo. Wyper, the man wot's going to drive the wan." Upon ripping it open, sirs, you may think o' my promiscus feelins when I read the . . . but you shall have the thing itself (continued the speaker), diving a hand into a pocket, which from its depth seemed to be devoid of a bottom, and extricating a rusty old glove which served the purpose of a pocket-book.

From a closely-packed roll of begrimed and bilious-looking papers, Melancholy Joey selected the one referred to, and after carefully unfolding it, so that the chafed folds might not separate from their fair proportions, he commenced reading the contents:

“Dear Joseph—I’m almost a-bustin with larfin to think how you will be laftat when our go of last night comes to be known to your pals and oun. But as you ave been an out-an-out radical with the lush, and most-ways treated me like a gel’mán, I won’t let it get you into trouble if so be you’re not a slap-up suck-egg of a fool. Now, Joey, think of a friend’s advice. Be partickler in telling the hodmen to draw the load with an old nurse’s care from the wan, for if they shake him, mark my words, Joey, he’ll rattle like marbles in a saucepan. And if so be any of the *real* mopers hear the row, they may take it into their obstinate heads to call for a jemmy or screwdriver. In this case, my fine

feller, you'd get struck with a fit o' the uglies. Your peepers would open like a couple of trap-doors, and your mouth stretch so that only half your head would remain on. Joey, all you'd see would be a few dozen o' large flint stones, grubbed up from the stable, and put there in place of your fat passenger by my leary partner O'Brien. Joey, you may think I'm a-lyin, but I'm not when I say, if I'd a-knowd of his dodge aforehand it shouldn't have happened. Howsomever, wot's done can't be undone, and all you've got to do is, mind and not have the box shaken, that's all. —HARRY DRINKAL."

You may suppose, sirs (said Mr. Wyper, replacing the letter in its former position), that I had a sort of a queerish sensation at this piece of news. All manner of fancies came over me. The old widder 'll insist on having just one last look, thought I, afore he's covered up. Then I feared we should have a upset, a hodman slip, or a rope snap. All

possible events for finding me out in the quandary were chewed very fine in my brain, I assure ye ; and as I got upon my box to join in the procession, no poor fellow ever mounted a much more uneasy seat in this world or the other, I know. As in a good many other affairs, appearances being agin me, no one would credit the truth in case the exchange was discovered ; and it being my first leadin job, all my hopes and prospects of course depended on the secret remaining snug and secure.

On our way to the yard, things went smooth enough. I was more gentle than a lamb with the tits, especially round the near corners, for, thought I, if one or two of them stones get loose, there'll be a-find-me-out to a certainty.

“ Be careful, Sammy,” said I to one of the hodmen as he unfastened the wan-door ; “ be careful, Sammy. Master partickerly ordered that he wasn’t to be jolted.”

“Mind your own business,” growled Sammy, for he was a ill-tempered chap, and couldn’t abide to be spoken to.—“I dare say,” continued he, in a loudish whisper, “you smacked him here at the rate of twelve mile an hour, and had the rest of the time in the taps along the road.”

“At no expense of yours, if I did,” replied I: “and as to minding my own business, I’m doing that when I’m instructin you.”

“Blow your cheek, young Bumpions,” returned he, turning blue with rage, and giving the coffin such a pull that sent all the blood tingling to my toes, and preparing to give it another dangerous tug.

Desperation, sirs, makes a man beside himself. Without thinkin of the consequences, but only of the likelihood of Sammy’s violence letting the cat out of the bag, I leaped off the box-seat, and, throwing the ribands across the tits, rushed to what I may call the rescue.

“Drop that as you would a hot tater,” cried I, clutching hold of the box which is the last package a man’s tucked up in in this life.

“Burn your imperence !” hallooed Sammy, planting a left-handed straight and strong un just in the middle of my pin-cushion. “Put that in your pipe,” said he.

It shrivelled me up, sirs, like a soaked leather glove. Down I tumbled back’ards, and laid sprawling in the road without a puff of wind in my internals. Master, who was a-standin with the old widder and the other kids of the fat old gentleman’s family at some little distance off, saw there was somethin amiss, and came running towards us like a lamplighter.

“Wot’s all this about, eh?” asked he, “wot’s all this about?”

Now Sammy was as artful a card as ever was picked, and seeing I couldn’t speak a word, said he, “Sir, I’m sorry to say Joey’s drunk.”

“Drunk!” exclaimed he, fixing a look upon me that I shall never forget: “drunk at a job like this! Oh, Joey! what a ungrateful varmint you are!”

“I’m not, sir,” replied I as well as I could, but each word seemed to prove to the contrary. “I’m not drunk, sir. Sammy’s hit me in the tenderest spot o’ my body, cause I wanted to see your orders obeyed, and he wouldn’t do ’em.”

“Shut up your caterwauling,” returned master, fit to kick all of us into the middle of the next year. “I’ll see into the row by-an-by. Not a undertaker with the best practice in England but must be in the Gazette if his men get *visibly* drunk at his jobs,” continued he.

After the performance was over, there was a reg’lar sort of trial, and master, believing my story, sent Sammy to the right-about-face, and, thinking a good plaster might be made out of it for the morning’s rumpus, went

with his best business-face to the family, and made out that I was one of the tenderest-buzzomed chicks ever hatched; “an individooal,” said he, “po-sessin the feelings of an angel—one who couldn’t tamely sit by and see a dead feller creetur jolted.” With a little more lingo, gents, he so scraped upon the catgut of the old widder, that she sent me the gift of a guinea, and a message to bid me remember “that one kind turn often brings another.”

As near as I can recollect, it was just two months after this funeral o’ the box of stones that we were ordered on a job to Kensington. The day was very wet and doleful-looking. A thick yellow fog hung in one dense cloud from house-tops to the damp and greasy stones. A drizzling rain fell, and the air seemed to drill itself through your wheezing lungs. Cold and wet, we arrived at the house where we were to take up, and the size of the building, with its out-of-the-way appearance, led me to inquire what it was.

“It’s a sylum,” replied one of our chaps a-decorating the board; “a sylum for people wot’s lost their wits.”

“Are we going then to earth one of ’em?” said I.

“Yes,” replied he; “we’re just about putting the finishing stroke to that which the horrors began, Joey.”

“What do you mean?” asked I.

“A strange dodge, certainly,” he returned, wisking a feather like a maid would a mop to shake the moisture out of it: “as rum a dodge as ever I heard of,” continued he. “One of the keepers told me as I was screwing him up—a fine young feller as a cover was ever clapped over—that he was a young doctor a-practising anatomy, and, wanting a subject, he went with some work-by-nights to raise one. Not knowing where they were going to, you may guess his surprise when he found himself in the churchyard of his own village. The horrors now began to creep upon him,

and he tried to persuade them to leave the place, but ‘No, no!’ was the answer, ‘not until we fill our bag.’ It *does* beat cock-fighting!” continued my pal. “When a body was turned up, hang me if it wasn’t the young gentleman’s maternal parent, wot had been there for some seven weeks.”

“Good God!” I exclaimed, rememberin the circumstance of the night: “and what followed?”

“From this moment the young feller became daft,” rejoined my pal; “and, sinking day by day, at last is going to be driven by Melancholy Joey to a cozy corner in the new cemetery.”

Such, sirs (continued the speaker) is the end of the story of THE RESURRECTIONIST.

When Mr. Wyper’s gradually dropping voice ceased to attract the attention of his audience, John Hogg rose from his pail, and, taking his friend’s dexter hand within his own, gave it a

long and hearty grasp. An unequivocal look of admiration illuminated his countenance : and brief but pithy was the expression of his approbation :

“Joey,” said he, “you’re a brick !”

CHAPTER XI.

THE LEGEND.

“ I like a true story,” observed Mr. Wirkem. “ There’s a relish in one which savours like salt in a herring, and no one can doubt Mr. Wyper’s.”

“ It was a slap-up one,” said one-eyed Jack. “ And, as to the truth on it, Mr. Wirkem, sir, Joey ain’t got enough o’ wot’s called poetry in his garret to make up such a slidin, slippery, oily-like *buster*.”

“ Truth is a recommendation, certainly,” remarked the Vice-president surlily, rapping his pipe upon the floor to eject the consumed and tasteless ashes. “ But that yarn was of the miserable order, and I think we all get

enough o' that truss without suckin it like a lollipop for pleasure."

"Different folk have different opinions upon different subjects," replied Mr. Wirkem. "Every one here has a right, when called upon, to sing or say whatever he chooses. And I *do* think, Bill Johnson," continued he, somewhat angrily and with much emphasis upon the auxiliary, "that when a gentleman can't lift his whip in a friendly salute, he'd better stick it between his knees instead of flanking it without cause."

John Hogg rubbed his knees triumphantly at the conclusion of his patron's observation, and, nodding his head significantly at Melancholy Joey, whispered, "There's a trump for ye."

A silence of some duration ensued after this remark from Mr. Wirkem. At length it was broken by his taking his glass, and saying, as a preliminary to the sip, and in a conciliatory tone, "When we're at Rome,

Bill Johnson, we should do as the Romans do."

"Certainly, Mr. Wirkem, sir," chimed in one-eyed Jack, with a twinkle of delight reflected in his bachelor organ of vision. "And when we're at Turkey," continued he, "we should do as the Turkeys do."

A roar of laughter followed Jack's misnomer of the nation addicted to turbans and a plurality of wives; but that individual only repeated the sage remark, and backed it by adding, "Them's *my* sentiments."

Good humour and good fellowship being restored, Mr. Wirkem suggested that "somebody might volunteer a stave, and then Mr. Wyper would exercise his right of call."

"I may appear too much of a leader in volunteers," said Richard Banbury, "having given one before. But, if it's agreeable, I'll try another."

"Do, Dick, my boy," replied the Presi-

dent. "For your warbling's like listening to a cock nightingale in broadcloth."

"It is, it is," were the general vociferations from all parts of the table.

"Then here's for a start," said the volunteer.

Let smiles and bright eyes beam on me,
To glad my fleeting hours ;
I love thee as a honey bee
Loves bright and blushing flowers.

Nay, let no pouting curl thy lip,
No tear-drops dim thine eyes ;
But from the morn of life let's sip
Joy's sunbeams as they rise.

The world would be a mournful one,
If doubts, and fears, and sighs,
Could lend to life their sadder tone,
And cloud our starry skies.

Then smile, dear girl, and let us say,
When Time has cull'd the flowers,
Our life was as a summer's day,
Pass'd with the laughing hours.

“ We don’t want a better song than that, gentlemen, I think,” said the President, approvingly. “ There’s none o’ your kickshaws and running up and down as if he was off the road ; but plain, pretty tuning that sinks into one’s buzzum.”

“ And below it, Mr. Wirkem, sir,” added John Hogg, placing his dexter hand tenderly upon his abdomidal regions. “ And below it, sir,” repeated he.

“ Ah !” soliloquized the President, turning his chin to the dingy ceiling, and sending forth a dense volume from the soporific weed, “ The direct road to a man’s heart is consistent with its approximating locality—the stomach.”

“ A truer sayin never came from a parson,” observed Bill Johnson. “ Don’t we see all sorts o’ charities—ospitals, schools, lunatic asylums, prisons, and suchlike institootions—supported by voluntary contributions—as they call postin the monkey. And how and

when is it done? Why, after a spread and a feed that 'd open any man's bowels of compassion, to be sure. Those very individuals," continued the sagacious Vice-president, "who come down with the dust handsumly after dinner, would n't fork out a single dib afore breakfast."

"Right, Bill, right," returned Mr. Wirkem, and with the air of a philosopher he continued, "There's a chain which links the filtered feelings of our nature with the grossest and most animal. Generosity is never so generous as when under the influence of roast beef and plum-pudding; turtle-soup and charity are twin-sisters, venison and friendship first-cousins. In a political point of view, in a religious point of view, and in a general point of view, nothing can be driven with smiling success on the box, unless, gentlemen—I say, unless, gentlemen," repeated the President, pausing for effect, "the passengers are well lined o' the inside."

There was no reply made to this observation, but each nodded a silent approval to his neighbour; and Mr. Wirkem was regarded by all as a man worthy of the post of first lord of the treasury.

“It’s my turn now,” whispered Melancholy Joey to his friend. “And I mean to clap the pall on you, John.”

“No, no, no,” returned Jack. “I’ve had a go in the mill. Shove the bit in another mouth.”

“I shall call on you,” obstinately rejoined Mr. Wyper, in an under-tone.

“If you do,” added one-eyed Jack between his teeth and clenching a fist with ominous portent, “I’ll —,” and he slightly shook it without finishing the sentence.

“Then I won’t,” returned Melancholy Joey.

After a brief silence the President said, “Now we’re all attention for the call. Who is it to be, Mr. Wyper?”

“I’m sure I don’t know, sir,” whined that individual. “Perhaps you’ll assist me in the job.”

“To be sure I will,” replied Mr. Wirkem, “if there’s no objection to it.”

“None in the least, I’m sure, Dick Wirkem,” added the Vice-president.

“Then, supposing we girt Tom Short; what say ye, Mr. Wyper, eh?”

Melancholy Joey gave an assenting jerk with his head.

“Well, sirs!” exclaimed Tom Short, in a rather expostulatory tone, “I didn’t expect to be called on to-night, and it’s rather late for a long story.”

“Then give us a short one,” replied the President.

“What must be must,” added Tom, with a sigh, “and so I suppose you must have one. When I was a boy, a tale was told to me by my grandmother, which, perhaps, may please ye.”

“No doubt of it,” rejoined Mr. Wirkem; “come, let’s have it.”

When Tom Short had drained a bumper “full and fair,” he commenced the following

LEGEND.

In an old manor-house, not far from the sea-shore, lived one of the loveliest ladies in England, called Agnes M’Caire. She was the heiress of a very rich old colonel, who had passed the best part of his life in India, and with age and hard service was upon the verge of his grave, when his daughter captivated—as it’s called by the gentry—a neighbouring gentleman; a fine, young, handsome fox-hunter.

Frederick Catonder, for that was his name, loved Miss M’Caire as others have loved, “not wisely but too well;” and, like most other women under such circumstances, she took advantage of his folly. Wild as a fawn, the lady cared not what people thought of her gay freaks, which were pretty constant

in some shape or other. Sometimes she would mount a vicious colt, deaf to the entreaties of every body, and ride him with the speed of a pressed stag over heath and moor, hill and valley; her long hair streaming in the wind, and a careless laugh ringing from her lips as she swept over break-neck fences, walls, and brooks. When the gale whistled across the tossing waves, occasionally she might be seen alone, steering a light boat over the mountain-billows, as fearless of danger as the white sea-gull.

Her father, who doted upon his untamed, beautiful child, never for a moment thought of checking with his authority any whim or inclination, however imprudent it might be. When angry at some past act of this kind, she would kiss and caress him out of ill-humour; and thus contrived to do just as she pleased.

'Tis said that no one could withstand any thing desired by Agnes M'Caire. If a

smile did not procure what was wished, a frown from her black flashing eyes was certain to do so. The talk of the country round was the heiress of the Manor-house. The poor blessed her, and prayed for her preservation, for her charity to them was boundless. The sick would find her gliding into the chamber, smoothing their pillow with ready hand, and administering the consolation of an angel, as she was—in some respects.

In appearance, Miss M'Caire was a perfect beauty. Her skin was pink and white mingled, like the tints of the lily and the rose; her figure was tall and proud in bearing; and, notwithstanding her wilfulness, but few eyes have seen a better or more lovely lady.

Among numbers of other gentlemen, Mr. Catonder started in the race for the prize of Agnes M'Caire. He was a true gentleman, with a kind, frank, and open heart. Not one in the country bore a superior name; and he

was the admitted straightest rider in the hunt, both far and near. For a long time the lady treated him, as she had done all others, with doubtful favour. Sometimes a cold distant look would be returned for an approaching attention; at other times, an unequivocal one of pleasure. Thus she continued to toy and play with the feelings of her admirers, just as an angler with a hooked trout; but Frederick Catonder had snared Miss M'Caire's heart, although he was ignorant of his success.

Tormented and tired with the conflicting conduct of Miss Agnes, he resolved to settle the affair at a short jump, yes or no; and one day, mounting his favourite horse, Mr. Frederick Catonder rode towards the manor-house for this purpose.

The morning had a dull look; the wind came in gusts, and then a dead calm ensued, changeable as the smiles and frowns of Miss M'Caire, when the lover, full of doubts and

fears, cantered between the row of towering elms upon the hard road leading to the manor-house.

The clattering of the horse's hoofs as he neared called the attention of Miss Agnes from teaching a pet spaniel to perform some trick; for her amusements generally consisted in attending upon her dogs and birds, and endeavouring to accomplish them in mischief. Books and music she never thought of, like other ladies; but occasionally all the servants and people about would stop in their work to listen to one of her untaught songs, which charmed like the fairy queen's. It was the old colonel's greatest delight for her to sit close to his easy chair in the evening, and, in a suppressed voice, chant some heart-melting prayer of her own making, as the sun was setting behind the distant hills.

Miss Agnes saw the horseman's approach, and at once thought of the object of his coming. It was earlier than usual for morn-

ing visits, and, from previous reasons, she had but little doubt of the cause of this one.

“He looks very handsome!” she exclaimed, “and he’s a kind, good, dear fellow. Shall I, or shall I not? That is my choice.” And her fair brow was knit in deep thought.

Ring the bell violently for her attendant, she hastily had her riding-habit put on, ordered her horse to be saddled and brought to the door immediately, and met Mr. Catonder upon the steps of the house, just as he had dismounted.

“Ah! Mr. Catonder. What, so early! I almost regret my intended gallop,” said Miss M’Caire, with as roguish a look as ever probed the heart of a man.

“Perhaps you will permit me to accompany you;” replied Mr. Catonder, looking rather confused.

“Well, I know of nothing that can be urged as a reasonable objection,” replied Miss Agnes, carelessly.

“I should try to overrule any that might be submitted *this* morning, I assure you, Miss M‘Caire,” rejoined Mr. Catonder, by way of a hint to what he was going to say.

“Indeed! What, so bold, Sir Knight!” exclaimed Miss Agnes, laughing.

“The coward often becomes desperate, you know,” replied he.

“Come, come, no craven similes. Coward, forsooth! What gentleman ever had a dastard’s nerves? If, by accident, there is such a thing, and he spoke, or even looked at me, I’d whip him from my sight like an offending hound.” And the lady’s riding switch cracked in the air as she suited the action to the words.

“By my honour, I shouldn’t like to come under the lash,” said Mr. Catonder: “but I hope I am in no such danger.”

“No, indeed. I believe you may deem yourself free from any such ordeal,” replied Miss Agnes.

“But where do you intend riding? Is the dewdrop to be brushed from the heath-bell, or the emerald turf pressed upon the downs?”

“Inquired with all the romance of a time-yellowed novel,” replied Miss M’Caire. “No more of such vapid nonsense to me. However, we’ll gallop over the downs to the seashore. You’ve no objection to ride fast?”

“None in the least,” was the reply.

“If you had, I should soon distance you; for I dote upon racing with my greyhounds there. You shall see the fleet fellows outstrip the wind. I love to see them fly along. Then how my horse tries to beat them in their matchless speed! Every muscle is strained to cracking. He throws back his ears, and sweeps the ground like a chased hare; I cheer him in his exertions. His veins full of fire, and swelled as the fibres on a vine-leaf, on we go in our chase of fun and glee, merry as a set of madcaps, as we are,”

said Miss Agnes, flushed with the excitement she felt at her own description.

The horse was now brought to the door, and no sooner saw his mistress than, giving a plunge forward, he neighed a loud recognition.

“You see what it is to be a favourite of mine,” said Miss M’Caire, smoothing the arched neck of her pleased horse, and springing lightly into the saddle.

“That it is an enviable condition,” replied Mr. Catonder, mounting his steed, and at one bound was at the side of the lady.

A small silver whistle was suspended round the neck of Miss Agnes: placing it to her lips, she blew a long shrill summons. It was answered by a leash of large superb greyhounds rushing towards them, which jumped to the saddle-bow, and screamed with delight when they arrived at the place where their mistress waited for them. Then they ran some distance before, and stood with pricked

ears, as if inviting the usual course of a joyful bloodless sport. It was the only one they were permitted to have; for no living creature was ever injured, or allowed to be, by Miss M'Caire. 'Tis said the birds even knew that they were free from danger when near her, and built their nests in the luxuriant ivy which crept about her bedroom casement, feeding without fear from her hands. Her gold fish would frisk about, and allow her fingers to caress them in the globe, when she dropped in fresh moss and grass, as was her daily custom. All things loved her, as well they might; for her kindness of heart was only equalled by her acts of goodness and charity.

Few have had so many blessings showered upon their heads as Miss Agnes. From childhood her name was never mentioned scarcely but with "Heaven save from harm, and watch over the good lady!"

It is impossible to say which appeared

most anxious for the run—Miss Agnes, the horse, or the greyhounds.

“ See how the creatures long for me to start !” said she, as the horse fretted and pulled upon her tightened reins.

“ And you are equally desirous to obey their wishes, if I’m not mistaken,” rejoined Mr. Catonder.

“ I admit most readily that I am, call me childish or not. So here’s for Hastings’ Cliff, and remember I stop not till there, my cavalier.”

Her horse reared upon his haunches, and jumped high into the air as the curbing-rein was slackened. The hounds gave a short cry of delight, and, to a loud cheerful “ Away !” from their mistress, on went the whole at a merry pace. With the speed of light they flew over the turf; hill and dale, slope and level, were all the same to them. Now and then a merry laugh was carried back upon the breeze, as it burst from the lips of the light-

hearted lady, which was all the sound that was heard in that rapid ride, save the heavy beating of the horses' feet upon the green-sward.

“ She is as wild as an unhooded hawk ; but then how beautiful she is ! ” thought Mr. Catonder, as he rode a little way behind. And, in truth, the manner in which she managed her horse was sufficient to win the heart of a fox-hunter. Erect she sat upon the saddle, yielding gracefully to the motion as the animal took his long and fast strides. Her elbows were close to her small waist, and the bridle-hand bent towards the pummel. Straight as an arrow she kept the course, and no fault could be seen in her matchless riding—a queen of beauty upon horseback.

Now they neared a wide brook. Poising her light whip, and checking the horse's speed slightly, they bounded across it with the ease and quickness of thought.

Whether Mr. Catonder's eyes were so bent

upon his fair companion as she charged the leap, or whether his horse balked the jump, was never known; but that he was thrown heavily, many yards over his horse's head, is quite certain. Miss M'Caire pulled up suddenly, and, suppressing a rising laugh at the fallen horseman, returned to inquire if any serious effects had resulted from his fall.

"Nothing of consequence," replied Mr. Cantoner, rising very pale from the shake.

"You look blanched with the tumble. How did it happen?" asked Miss Agnes, now laughing heartily at the mishap.

He was, however, too much chagrined to answer; his lip was between his teeth, and a frown bent his brow over his eyes. It may appear to some a trifling circumstance; but a fall in the presence of a lady makes a man feel so ridiculous, that the temporary annoyance can hardly be exceeded: this, too, before one in whose estimation he wished to stand superlatively well at this time was peculiarly un-

fortunate and irritating to Mr. Catonder. He mounted again, and, with rather an assumed good-humour than real, said—

“ I’m the unluckiest fellow living. However, let us proceed in the gallop.”

“ No, I thank you. Since it pleased you to stop without my consent, or indeed your own, we’ll now proceed leisurely to the Cliff, which is, you see, close to us,” rejoined Miss Agnes, laughing so that it was impossible for her to continue the gallop, if desired. “ What a singular position that you chose just now !” continued she, chafing him more severely than she was aware of. “ Oh, thou Nimrod ! where is thy wonted skill ? For me to lead and throw thee ! Well may I say, what a falling off was there !” And then she laughed again till the tears stood in her eyes.

Mr. Catonder tried to join in the merriment of Miss M’Caire ; but it was an attempt as awkward as his fall.

They proceeded slowly to the verge of the

towering heights, bounding the lashing waves, and dismounting, sat upon the turf to rest themselves, Miss Agnes still alluding to the accident with hints and jokes, Mr. Catonder still vexed, and in great ill-humour.

The mist which hung gloomily upon the boundless waters now began to roll away, and the bright clear sun broke from his cloudy curtain upon earth and sea, rendering dull Nature in a moment brilliant and cheerful. The gull wheeled in lofty flight its graceful circles over the deep blue ocean, now dipping, and then rising with a wild scream of delight to shake the salt drops from its snowy breast; the curlew skimmed with rapid wing his restless course, hovering over a swelling wave to snatch occasionally his precarious fare; the bleached sails of a ship were just visible in the horizon; and altogether the attractive scene riveted the attention of Miss M'Caire, and changed her bantering and mirth into thoughtful admiration.

She was sitting in a leaning posture, with one arm round the neck of a favoured hound, the other holding the rein of the horse, who was cropping the short herbage. Her large dark eyes were bent upon the vessel fading from the view far at sea, when she felt a hand pressed slightly, and a few soft words whispered in her ears with faltering tone, that sent the crimson blood into her cheeks. It was a triumphant moment for Frederick Cantonder. No answer came from the lady; but from her countenance he saw that his success was certain — that he was an accepted lover; and he concluded in brief raptures by thanking her for the silent granting of his suit.

Did I say concluded? I believe after this a waist was clasped, and upon a pair of ruby lips a first, long, clinging kiss was printed, yielded without reluctance or affected coyness.

For many minutes not a word was spoken. At length Miss M'Caire sprang upon her

feet and said—"Now, Frederick, we'll return."

How pleasing was that familiar name to Mr. Catonder! He looked his delight, and said—"What can I do or say to prove the sincerity of my affection?"

"Words are mere empty sounds, changed and forgotten in a succeeding breath. This is not the age of chivalry; brave knights no longer break lances or their necks for smiles, scarfs, and roses; therefore neither vows nor deeds are required," rejoined Miss Agnes.

"I wish from my heart that an action could be done, in order to show that my protestation is not the too common one of mere form," replied Mr. Catonder, warmly.

"Perhaps another leap would not be objectionable, if I wished it," said Miss M'Caire, with a sly look, as they turned their horses towards home.

"The Demon's Footmark, if it will please you," replied he, with flashing eyes.

Now this Demon's Footmark was a chasm in the Cliff. It formed a close resemblance to the mark of a foot of gigantic proportions, doubtlessly occasioned by the continued beating of the sea at the base, which from time to time had washed parts of the chalky substance away. The top crumbling for want of support had left this gaping cleft, which, from the peculiarity of its shape, was thus so called. It was about twenty-four feet in width, and some four or five hundred in depth, scooped out of the cliff. Miss Agnes, unthinking of the way in which the feelings of Mr. Catonder were irritated at the accident that befel him, recurred to it in jest, as was her usual way in all things. When he said that he would jump the Demon's Footmark, which was within a few yards of them, Miss M'Caire, not dreaming of the seriousness of the offer, laughed at it, and said—

“Remember what happened half an hour since. Be not too brave in such volunteer

boasts, or I shall challenge you to try another puddle."

The words had scarcely passed her lips when Mr. Catonder dashed the rowels into his horse's flanks, and with furious speed flew towards the fearful leap. With outstretched neck the punished horse neared the edge—was upon it—and seeing the awful depth, the terrified creature hesitated, drew back upon his haunches, but too late to avoid the jump—he sprung from the ground, and fell with his fore-legs upon the other side of the precipice, his hind-ones hanging over the declivity. Trying to recover himself, he scrambled upon the verge, sending the earth and stones beneath with his struggles for life, which fell heavily to the bottom. Sliding at every plunge farther down, the horse at last reeled like a balanced weight, and, for a moment becoming still, the rider clutched the broad leaves of a large dock-weed, just as the groaning animal went backwards upon the rocks

beneath, with every bone broken and sinew cracked. With one hand grasping the weed was suspended the ill-fated horseman over the terrific depth, the stems of a few green weak leaves holding him between warm life and inevitable death.

Frozen with horror, Miss M'Caire beheld the frenzied action. Immoveable and breathless, she watched the desperate position of both as they struggled upon the breaking edge of the yawning precipice. Her hands clasped together, with eyes starting from their sockets, and ceaseless beating heart, she watched the terrible exertions of the horse. Upon seeing him launched beneath, and the rider grasp the dock-weed growing upon the brink, just within his reach, a scream of mingled terror and joy burst from her so loud and shrill, that an old fisherman said that he heard it a league at sea. In an instant she rushed to assist him from the peril. Leaf by leaf was cracking in his hand; another in-

stant, and the last must have severed, when, kneeling upon the extreme edge, the lady caught the hand in hers as the remaining leaf snapped in his fingers ; and thus locked together, both fell into the abyss, mangled, shapeless, and bleeding corpses.

In the dead of night, as the coast-guard paces his solitary walk, his nerves tremble and his blood is chilled as an unearthly screech is borne upon the breeze. The fishermen, as they are spreading their nets, pause and gaze in silence at each other as it sweeps past them ; but 'tis never heard by any without a prayer for the unhappy lovers of Hastings' Cliff.

As Tom Short concluded his story, a slight snore was heard from the neighbourhood of John Hogg's pail. The attention of the assembly being called to that quarter, Melancholy Joey was discovered wrapped in the arms of Death's half-brother—an exemplifi-

cation of the ruling passion strong in sleep. His lips held a pipe long since extinguished, and continued to emit imaginary puffs of the narcotic plant. Puff, puff, went the sleeper, much to the amusement of one-eyed Jack, who, pointing to his friend, said — “ Mr. Wirkem, sir, that’s as nateral to him as sucking to a cock-robin.”

The President smiled at Jack’s simile, and, rising from his chair, took leave of his boon companions, and they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

TODDY, THE POSTBOY.

It was within a short half-hour of the time fixed for the assembling of the club that John Hogg's powers of creating a blaze were taxed to the utmost of their capacity. Kneeling before the wide grate, he gently blew the newly-lighted fuel, and carefully insinuated between the bars chips of dry wood and little tempting lumps of coal. But all these strenuous endeavours appeared fruitless. The obstinate smoke curled any where and every where except up the chimney; and no sooner did a corner evince a decided symptom of spreading its genial germs of heat, than the deceptive hope was smothered by an extinguishing gust from the opposing wind above,

below, around, driving its wintry breath through each cranny of the old house, and making every casement rattle as it passed.

“ Well, if this ain’t enough to give a feller a fit o’ the uglies, I should like to know what is !” soliloquized one-eyed Jack, surveying, with a look of hopeless despair, the expiring sparks in the charred and partly scorched embers.

Again and again he tried ; and just as there was a more than ordinarily plausible pretext for flattering his hopes with success, the door of the apartment was flung suddenly back upon its hinges, and as suddenly out went the fire, from the counteracting current.

With wrath portrayed in every contracted muscle of his features, John Hogg arose from his devotional attitude, and, with the amiable expression of a bull-dog with his tail in a vice, turned to learn the occasion of his discomfiture.

As yet the chandelier was not lit, and the

only ray of light in the room proceeded from one solitary candle in the neck of a broken bottle, flaring on the table. By its doubtful aid, something was seen looming through the murky darkness; but, notwithstanding Jack strained his eyes, and peeped and peered to learn the nature of the comer, he was incapable of accomplishing the design.

“ Now then, my spicy kid !” at length said he, “ you move like a stack o’ chimneys after a bricklayer. Who the devil may *you* be ?”

“ Here’s a go ! ha ! ha ! ha ! Boil us up a gallop ! ha ! ha ! ha !” and the author of these unconnected sentences continued to give vent to his mirth, until its mockery was rung from every quarter of the building.

“ What, Toddy !” exclaimed John Hogg, with serious surprise, and striding towards the party addressed ; “ is that you, old heart of oak ?”

“ Who *should* it be, if it ’t isn’t me ?” was the reply, interrogatively ; and without further observation, a hearty grasp of hands was

exchanged between one-eyed Jack and the stranger, who continued to laugh without intermission, although there was no apparent cause for the roar that echoed far and wide.

“Who *should* it be but me?” repeated he, and again he laughed long and loudly.

“Stop a bit,” said Jack; “I can’t laugh in the dark. Just lift the line off that nail there,” continued he, pointing to the one which supported the hoop, “and I’ll make a flare-up.”

With alacrity Jack’s directions were obeyed, and in a brief period every candle was sending forth a cheerful blaze, and the chandelier was again hoisted to its wonted position.

“Now, Toddy,” said John Hogg, surveying the stranger from toe to crown, “I can see your ugly mug!”

The individual addressed as “Toddy” was a little, square-built, sturdy-looking fellow, who might probably have eaten plum-pudding on fifty successive Christmas-days from the commencement of his tour through life

up to the present time. Every distinctive feature of and about his person *turned up*. From being much shorter than the generality of his species, his eyes invariably *turned up*. His nose was of the order celestial, and *turned up* naturally. His chin *turned up* towards his nose, which it approached in almost Siamese twin-like affinity. His broad-brimmed white hat *turned up* both before and behind; the cuffs of a long-skirted drab coat *turned up*; the superfluously long toes of his top boots *turned up*; and even a pair of antiquated spurs, which were buckled on his heels — alas! now only for ornament — *turned up* their tormenting rowels from *terra firma*.

Round the throat and cleanly-shaved double chin of this individual a white cravat was twisted with scrupulous care, and a large brooch, of questionable value, occupied the centre of a very natty tie. His countenance bore the expression of great good-humour, and his complexion that of ruddy health,

mingled with a few purple spots, pleasantly diversified here and there, giving the observer an idea that Toddy was not a member of the Temperance Society.

“ And so you found us out, eh ? ” said Jack, again bestirring himself to obtain the raising of a fire in the stove.

“ Found ye out ! ” repeated Toddy, diving both hands into his breeches-pockets, and stretching his legs with an air of satisfaction. “ Who *should* find ye out, if I didn’t ? ” continued he.

“ But do you know,” returned Jack, with a little hesitation and embarrassment, “ I almost fear—— ” and then he stopped to puff an expiring spark into fresh life.

“ Fear what ? ” asked Toddy.

“ That you’re not what’s called qualified for a member in this free-and-easy,” replied Jack, with reluctance.

“ Ain’t I, though ? ” rejoined Toddy, with a wink. “ If I ain’t feathered for this here

company, I *should* like to know who is!" continued he.

"How?" briefly inquired Jack, stopping in the act of supplying fresh fuel to the now blazing fire.

"Can't I sing, tell tantariddles, smoke, and drink like blue-blazes?" returned Toddy, with confidence. "And if them accomplishments," resumed he, "won't get a chap into the best, tip-top, slap-up company in *this* world, I *should* like to know what 'll get him in the world to come?"

"That's all right enough," rejoined Jack, in a tone conciliatory; "but something more's wanted here."

"And what's the addition?" asked Toddy.

"You must have been a coachman," replied Jack, "and chalked off the road by the rail."

"And ain't I been chalked off the road by the rail?" said Toddy, with asperity in the query.

“To be sure you have,” returned Jack, “and I’m uncommon sorry for it. But then, Toddy,” continued Jack, in a persuasive voice, “that’s only half the dodge.”

“I don’t see that,” replied Toddy. “If I an’t rode and drove the first north and east stage from the Old George Inn, Hounslow, for five an’ thirty year, I *should* like to know who has!” continued he.

“Not as coachman?” rejoined Jack.

“But as postboy I have,” added Toddy.

“Ay, there’s where it is, my tulip,” returned Jack, conclusively. “Post *boy* and coach *man* are not grafts from the same tree; and there you’re floored, not being a man, Toddy.”

“*Professionally* I’m a boy,” said Toddy, “always have been a boy, and always shall be a boy; but” — and here the speaker issued a somewhat savage laugh — “if there’s any gentleman, present or absent, wot doubts my being a man out of the shop meaning, I *should* like for him just to say so;” and, without further

observation, he drew his drab coat from his shoulders, and flung it across the back of a chair.

“Well!” exclaimed Jack, admiringly, and regarding the pugnacious Toddy with the pleasure of an enthusiastic limner’s survey of a Raphael, “you’re a little game cock, an’ it were worse than a pity to spoil your humour with disappointment; so we’ll have a round or two just for love and old acquaintance sake.”

“Very good,” shortly returned Toddy, dispossessing himself of his hat and a short, dark, blue jacket.

Jack dragged the table from its usual place, and, after stowing away a few chairs, the floor was cleared for action.

“Now,” said Jack, smiling, and putting himself in a fighting posture, offensive and defensive, “pepper away, Toddy.”

Squaring with pugilistic science, Toddy skipped round and about his wary opponent, who resembled a cat guarding against the

attack of a yapping cur. Shortly upon his heel Jack turned to face his nimble combatant, and warded off each blow, as it was aimed at various parts of his *corpus delicti* with admirable skill, but never offering to return the compliment. After some ineffectual attempts on the part of Toddy to get a blow planted, except in the thin, unresisting air, the first stroke of a clock from a neighbouring church fell upon Jack's ear, announcing that the hour for the meeting of the club had arrived.

"I must settle this business now," said he, "right away," and, smiling as he spoke, he drew his dexter fist back, and, sending it out after the fashion of a horse's kick, and with little less velocity, struck poor Toddy's turned-up nasal organ flat to his chin, rolling him over backwards on the floor.

Precisely at this moment, even in the nick of time, Mr. Wirkem entered, closely followed by the major part of his companions; and, to their astonishment, scarcely had the President

advanced a foot within the room, when Toddy was flung at his feet, bleeding, stunned, and vanquished.

Amazed at this unlooked-for proceeding, Mr. Wirkem continued on the threshold of the door, expressing his surprise by first directing his eyes to the fallen Toddy at his feet, and then casting them towards Jack for an explanation. That individual, however, appeared to be in no great hurry to afford one, for, as soon as he had floored his adversary, and perceived the witnesses of his prowess by, he forthwith turned his attention to nursing the fire, whistling "Jump, Jim Crow," as he drove the poker between the bars, and by his manner looked innocent of all participation in the apparent bloody feud.

"Bless my stars and garters!" at length ejaculated Mr. Wirkem, "what's all this about, eh?"

Still Jack gave no reply, but busied himself in heaping more fuel on the fire, making the

flames lick in serpent-folds near a third of the chimney's height.

"I say, you sir," said the President, sharply, "what's all this about, I say?"

"Only Mr. Wirkem, sir," replied Jack, in the tone palliative, "only a little friendly mill."

"Friendly mill!" repeated his patron, while he and the assembled members of the club gathered round the still motionless Toddy, and minutely examined his upturned features streaked with gore. "Friendly mill!" repeated Mr. Wirkem, more seriously than that person's voice ever saluted Jack's ear before, "why the man's dead!"

"Oh, dear, no, Mr. Wirkem, sir!" replied Jack, joining the circle formed about the prostrate Toddy. "Oh, dear, no, Mr. Wirkem, sir, that's impossible," continued he: "a chap dies, I'm told, for want o' breath. Now I never touched him in the wind; not so much as a little finger neared his bellows by a long shy."

“He’s as stiff as a Yarmouth bloater,” said Bill Johnson, proceeding to lift the unconscious Toddy from the ground.

“Stop a moment, sirs,” returned Jack, “I’ll fig him in his senses again,” and, clutching the inanimate victim by the back of his neck, he raised him with the same ceremony as usually is observed when a whelp is about to be ejected from a second-floor window. “There !” continued he, dropping his burthen into the President’s chair, and Toddy fell into it, much after the fashion of a wet blanket, all of a heap.

“We’d better send for a ’pothecary,” said Tom Short, “he’s cat’s-meat, to a certainty.”

“Poo, poo, poo !” uttered Jack, impatiently, “give him a drop o’ sum’at short, and he’ll come round in the quickest turn you ever see.”

In an instant Mr. Wirkem produced the key of the stores ; a bottle was uncorked, a glass filled and quickly tendered to the spirit-loving lips of Toddy. But now they declined their functions and pleasureable offices.

This passive declaration of "total abstinence" gravely altered the effect of Jack's former confidence.

"Swaller it, can't ye!" hallooed he, squeezing the edge of the glass into Toddy's compressed lips; but they evinced no inclination to perform even the introduction to the task. After many such ineffectual attempts, a colour spread itself gradually over the countenance of John Hogg, having the sombre shades of thick water-gruel. At length, he retreated a step or two, and, looking into the President's face with something akin to fear developed, said, "Mr. Wirkem, sir, Toddy's *hashed*, by G—d!"

This announcement caused no little sensation among the party, one and all having sufficient reason to give credence to its correctness. Tom Short suggested that "the coroner should at once be summonsed, as, without unnecessary trouble, he could form an inquest to sit upon him." At length, however, after

many suggestions from all, and each varying from its fellow, their fears were greatly relieved by the heaving of Toddy's bosom, as a preliminary to a decided grunt from the same locality.

"He's comin' to hisself," whispered Jack, rubbing both his knees with satisfaction. "Won't he suck a drop in presently, that's all!" continued he, holding the glass ready for immediate use.

When several grunts had escaped from Toddy's breast, he gradually opened his upturned eyes, and turned them vacantly and heavily upon the bystanders, permitting them to rest upon the last of them, which chance decreed should be the person of one-eyed Jack. A smile, a faint and sickly smile, passed, like a sunbeam through a bilious December fog, over the damaged features of poor Toddy, as he recognized his late opponent in the fistic art, and, motioning for the proffered glass to be held nearer, he drank its contents to the

last drop. Then, gently feeling the tip of his nose, he lifted it as easily as the fractured lid of a snuff-box, and, letting it fall again in its new position, said, "Jack, if that wasn't a wipe o' the mug, I *should* like to know wot is."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack, "wasn't it a swift un?"

"Ay," coincided Toddy, "and so straight."

In a few minutes Toddy was himself again, except the flattened cartilage of his nose, which, to record the truth, was any thing but detrimental to his beauty; and Mr. Wirkem, being made acquainted with the details of the encounter, expressed it as his opinion that "each man had done his duty."

"Now comes the question," observed the President, "whether this candidate, Mr. Toddy, is to be admitted in this free an' easy? I won't say that he's qualified within the strict rules of our waybill; for a boy's no more a man than an old woman is. But the rest of

our mates 'll be here presently, and then we'll settle the matter."

Scarcely had the old coachman done speaking, when the clatter of feet was heard tramping up the yard, shortly followed by the entry of the remaining members, Melancholy Joey bringing up the rear.

"Here you are, my lads of wax!" exclaimed Mr. Wirkem, with pleasure, exchanging salutations with them as they entered. "Now take your seats," continued he, occupying his own; "we've a little matter o' business to arrange before we begin our jollity."

He then explained the affair which had just taken place, with all its peculiarities, and concluded his observations by saying: "There's an exception to every rule — in other words, however square a nag's tail may be, there's certain to be an odd hackle or two in it. Now, gentleman, I think Mr. Toddy may pass as an odd hackle; for, although not a coachman, he's been a driver, and though, in

a business sense, he's a boy, still, no one here can doubt but that he's a man from toe to heel. As to the second part of the qualification, he's as much entitled to that claim as I am," continued Mr. Wirkem, enthusiastically, "and I hope no one will raise the voice of opposition to his being elected a member of THE CHALKED-OFF COACHMAN'S FREE AN' EASY."

"As far as I'm concerned," said the Vice-president, getting on his legs as Mr. Wirkem became reseated, "I shall second the motion, and I'm proud of the opportunity."

"Does any gentleman propose an amendment?" inquired Mr. Wirkem.

"No, no, no," replied several voices.

"Then, Mr. Toddy," said the President, with an air of patronage, "I've the satisfaction of informing you that you're elected, *nemo dissentient*."

"And I'm very proud in becomin' a nemo what-ever-you-may-call-it," replied Toddy.

“And so here’s luck,” continued he, draining a glass prepared by the ready fingers of John Hogg, and occupying a chair placed next to Melancholy Joey, a little removed from the table by Jack’s superior tact and judgment.

“Now, sirs,” said Toddy, somewhat prematurely, “I’ll give ye a sentiment.”

“Clap the muzzle on!” exclaimed Jack, horrified at his friend’s presumption, “you mustn’t lead off in that style.”

“It’s a rule here, Mr. Toddy,” said the President, correctingly, “to wait for a call, and then never to refuse. Occasionally we have a volunteer, but that’s very seldom, and then we always have a little notice of what’s coming. However, that you couldn’t know unless told, and therefore no blame’s to be attached for being before your time. Better be always before than sometimes after. Now, sir, we shall be happy to hear your sentiment.”

“I shall know better by-an’-by,” replied

Toddy, stirring up a second beaker of grog. "But come, sirs, 'in our journey through life may we live well on the road!'"

"With all my heart!" religiously responded Jack; and each seemed to find an echo in his heart as he drained his glass.

"What is it to be now?" said the President; "a song or a yarn?"

"Let's have a yarn," replied Dick Banbury.

"Then make your call, Tom Short," added Mr. Wirkem.

"I will, sir," returned Tom, "so tip us one of yours, Dick," said he, nodding to Banbury. "I know you've seen a game or two."

"Ah!" sighed Dick, "my whole life's been a game, and a losing one."

"Then let's have a hand of it," said Mr. Wirkem; "we often gain by another's loss."

"I don't think I could do better," replied Banbury, "than give a slip of my early days—a chance upon which the balance of the future hung."

“Let’s have it, by all means,” rejoined the President.

“You shall,” returned Banbury. And he thus began.

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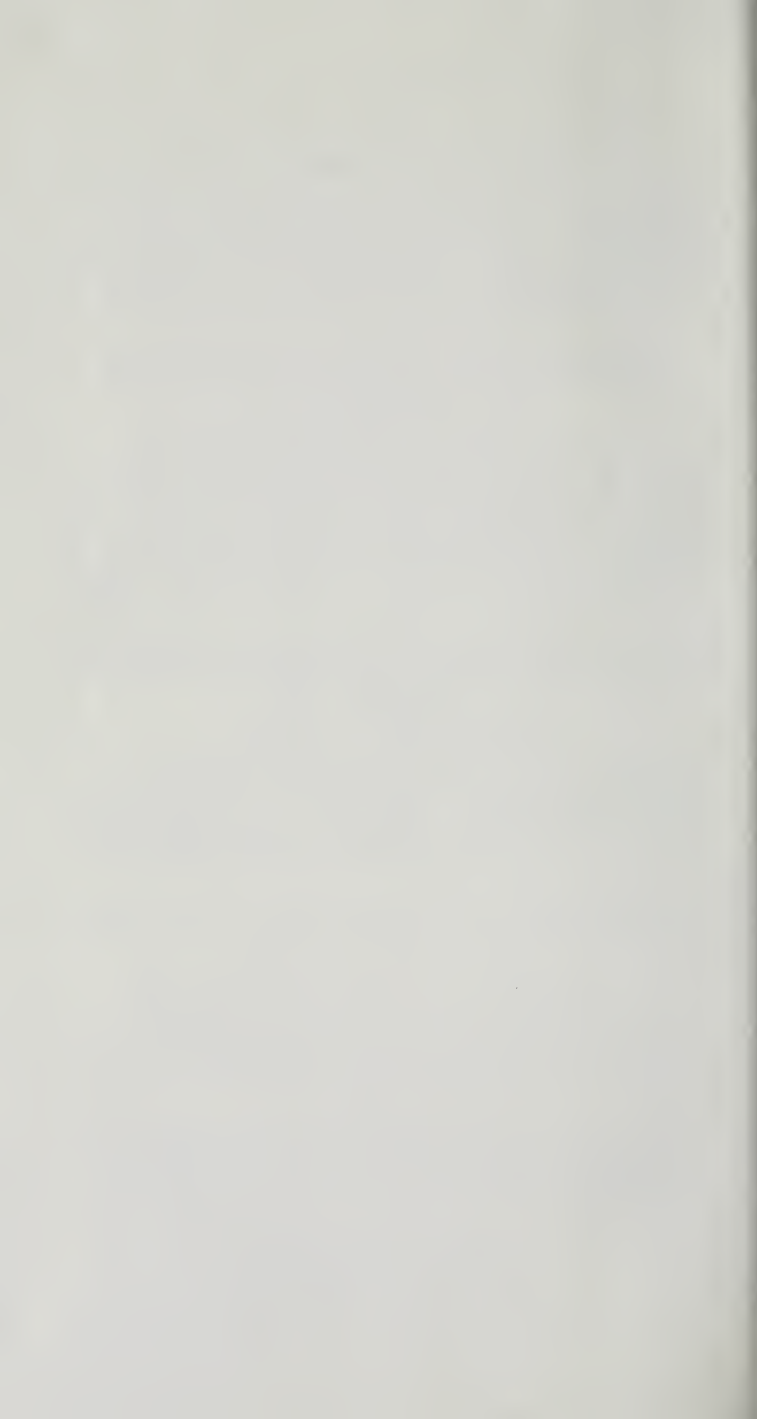
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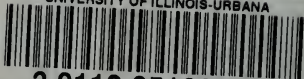
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